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“WITH THE BOOK UPON HER LAP, AND ONE ARM AROUND HER  
LITTLE SISTER” Page 24



# RANDY'S SUMMER

*A STORY FOR GIRLS*

✓ BY

AMY BROOKS

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*WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR*



BOSTON

LEE AND SHEPARD, PUBLISHERS

1900

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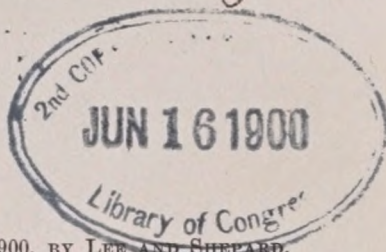
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RANDY'S SUMMER.



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# RANDY'S SUMMER

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## CHAPTER I

### RANDY AND THE FAIRY TALES

"RANDY! Randy! where are you?" came in shrill, high-pitched tones from the kitchen.

The girl on the wooden seat just outside the door neither moved nor heeded, so engrossed in her book was she.

"Ran-dee!" This time there was a rising inflection on the last syllable. Slowly the girl's forefinger followed along the line which she was reading. A quick step across the kitchen, and a tall, angular woman appeared in the doorway, wiping her hands on her blue-checked apron.

"Why, Randy Weston! Here I've been

callin' and callin' to you, and you're right here at the door and never heard at all, I'll warrant you. What's that you're readin'?"

"Oh, mother, I'm sorry I didn't hear you," said Randy, her face still aglow with the thought of the fascinating tale; "but the story was so wonderful that I never knew you called me."

"Must have been wonderful," said Mrs. Weston, smiling. "What sort of a book is it, and where did you get it?"

"Why, it's the one I told you I found in the field back of the barn," said Randy. "It's all about kings and queens, and princes and fairies, and goblins, and oh, it's just the most wonderful book you ever saw!"

"I hope it's a *good* book," said Mrs. Weston, doubtfully; "it sounds kind of outlandish, and I know one thing, I never have to call twice when I give you 'Pilgrim's Progress' or Fox's 'Book of Martyrs' to read."



“But, mother, just see the pictures! Here’s the one that shows when the prince rode on the horse which was shod with golden shoes, and could run faster than the wind!”

That was too much for practical Mrs. Weston.

“Look here, Randy, that’ll do! That shows what kind of a book it is. Who ever heard of shoeing a horse with gold! Land knows it costs enough to shoe them with iron; and as for running faster than the wind, why, anybody’d know better. You give me the book till I ask your father what he thinks of it. I’ll put it up on the mantel, back of the clock, and show it to him to-night and see what he says.”

As Mrs. Weston usually meant what she said, Randy was forced to submit; but she could not help thinking it a trial to have to do without the wonderful book until her father should have time to read it.

“Now,” said Mrs. Weston, “come in and help me make these pies.”



"Oh, yes," said the girl; while she thought, "What a change from the prince's castle to the hot kitchen and apple pies!" However, she was a thoughtful girl, and seeing a tired look on her mother's face, she took a big yellow dish on her lap, and grasping a knife began to pare apples as if her life depended upon it.

The first she pared rapidly and deftly, the next one took her a little longer, and the sixth she held in one hand while the knife lay idly in the other, as she gazed out of the window, wondering if the hot, sunny road which led to the village could be at all like the high-road over which the king's huntsmen returned to the castle.

"Randy Weston! I thought you was parin' apples! Bring the dish here and we'll finish them together. At that rate you wouldn't get them done in a month!"

Randy started. "Oh, dear! I meant to have peeled them in no time," said she.

"Well, never mind," said her mother; "we'll do them together, and then you can

get out the things for me to make the crust with."

Soon the apples were pared, cored, and sliced, and away Randy hurried to the closet, getting the sifter, sugar-bucket and rolling pin, the spice box, and last of all, a lot of plates.

Running back to the closet she brought out the lard and began to grease the plates in furious haste, so determined was she to show her mother that she was really willing to be helpful. How she admired the deft manner in which her mother rolled out the crust, stretched it over the plate, and inserted her knuckles to make it fit the hollow of the dish.

Randy watched her as, balancing the crust-covered plate on her left hand, she swept the knife which she held in her right swiftly around the edge of the plate, trimming off the extra crust.

"I wish I could make pies as quick as you can," said the girl, "and have them turn out right every time, too."



Mrs. Weston smiled at the compliment so earnestly expressed.

"Mebbe you can, when you've made as many as I have," said she.

"Now get the broom, Randy, and sweep up the flour I spilled 'round the table and put the apple peels in the bucket, while I commence to wash up the cookin' dishes."

Randy got the broom and began to sweep vigorously. "I wonder," thought the girl, "if princesses have to bake pies, and wash dishes, and sweep hot kitchens." She could not remember of any mention being made of either pies or kitchens in the fairy tales which she had been reading, so she concluded that in those delightful days no such things existed.

"They *must* have had pies," she said to herself, "so p'r'aps they had somebody to bake for them, same's Mrs. Hodgkins has Sophrony Brown to help her about the housework.

"Sophrony Brown doesn't look 's if she belonged in a castle, even to stay in the



kitchen, if it had one," thought Randy. "Her hair's red, and so are her hands, and they're awful big, too. Everybody in that splendid book was handsome, and they all had little white hands and tiny feet, too." Here she stopped and took a long survey of her own feet, encased in coarse, cowhide boots, with leather lacings.

"The shoes and slippers in the pictures," mused Randy, "have beautiful bows on the toes, and they have tiny little heels. I wonder how they ever managed to walk on them." So still she stood, looking down at her shoes, the broom held listlessly in her hand, that her mother turned to see where she had gone.

"Why, Randy Weston, what ails you? You've been mooning 'round all this morning. You do try to help me real good, and then, first thing I know, you're miles away thinkin' of something or other. I say, whatever ails you?"

"Nothing," said Randy, "I was only wondering about the fairy tales in the book."

"Well, more'n ever I think it can't be a good kind o' book to read, that makes a good, sensible girl so took up with it that she can't think of anything else."

"But if father says it's all right, I can read it, can't I?" said Randy.

"I suppose so," said the tired woman. "Now go and find Prue. Like enough she's into something by this time."

Little Prue had a positive talent for inventing mischief, and as Randy hastened to the door to call her, she remembered that the little sister had had at least an hour in which to play without supervision. "I do hope," said Randy, "that she hasn't torn her dress or lost her sunbonnet while I've been helping mother with the cooking. I'll call first, and if she don't answer, then I'll hunt for her." So, standing in the doorway, she called long and loudly.

Such a pretty picture Randy made, all the sweeter because she never dreamed that she possessed the beauty of which she read in the fairy book, and for which she so ardently longed.



The kitchen doorway was low, and up on one side grew scarlet runners, which over the top clasped tendrils with the morning glories as they clambered up the other side of the door-frame and half covered the kitchen window.

The cool wind from across the meadow fanned Randy's flushed cheeks, and tossed back some short brown ringlets from her forehead, for Randy's hair would curl, as she said, "spite of anything." She did her best with brush and comb to make it lie smoothly, but the short ends flew back every time, and curled and rippled in a manner which would have been the envy of many a city girl who was a slave to "curlers." Her hair was a soft, light brown, and her eyes were large and gray, bright and twinkling. She was quite tall for a girl of her age, just fifteen that summer, and she stood as "straight as a birch," her father said.

Her plain calico gown and coarse apron could not hide her trim figure; and, judg-



ing by her small, shapely hands, and slender fingers, one would say that with dainty boots instead of cowhides, her feet would be as shapely as her hands. But Randy had never thought much about beauty or personal adornment until the finding of the wonderful fairy book. She had been dressed like the other children in that little country town, and had never seen a fashion book or a stylishly dressed person in her life. Mrs. Weston had taught her children to think that to be neat and clean was to be well dressed, and certainly Randy and Prue were always dressed in clean gowns and aprons, and stiff-starched sunbonnets. Yes, Randy was more than pretty. Would she one day know it?

Long and patient calling brought no answering shout from little Prue, so Randy snatched her sunbonnet from its peg on the wall, and started in search of her. She looked in every place, both possible and impossible, and she laughed as she thought of the funny scrapes the little

sister had gotten into. She thought of the day on which their aunt, Miss Prudence Weston, had come to visit them, bringing three bags and as many bundles, although she was to stay but a week.

She had always lived in a little town in one of the Western states, and as that week's stay was her first visit to her brother's home, she was really a stranger to Randy and Prue. The children had known only that little Prue was her namesake, and that she was a person well-nigh perfect.

"Your Aunt Prudence never did that," was a remark so frequently addressed to little Prue that that lively, mischievous little being conceived a great dislike for so perfect a person; and, although she dared not say so to either father or mother, she confessed it freely to Randy when at night they lay in their little bed in the chamber under the eaves.

"I think it would be just horrid to live in this house if Aunt Prudence lived here too, don't you, Randy?" said little Prue



in a loud whisper. "You're good, Randy, and you know I love you, but you can be naughty and Aunt Prudence can't, that's the difference."

"Oh, hush!" Randy had said. "I most think it's naughty not to like her. We don't know but may be she's real nice if we knew her."

"Don't want to," whispered Prue, "don't want to, *ever*. If she staid here I'd — I mean I'd —" but the tired little sister had gone fast asleep and left Randy to wonder just what she would have done.

Immediately upon her arrival Miss Prudence had removed her wraps, and had at once taken out her knitting from a voluminous pocket, saying to the two staring children, as she peered at them over her glasses, "It's not right to waste time," and as soon as they had made their escape to the kitchen, naughty little Prue had said, "Randy Weston! If keeping busy would make me look like that, I'd just do nothing forever and ever."



Funny little Prue! Aunt Prudence's sharp eyes behind her spectacles, her "false front," and tall, angular figure, had strengthened the child's preconceived dislike. Then that day before their aunt had bidden adieu to the Weston farm, Randy had caught Prue perched upon a chair, which made her just high enough to see herself in the glass. On her head was Miss Prudence's best cap, on her saucy little nose the big, old-fashioned spectacles, over which she peered at herself, saying, in imitation of her aunt, "I never waste time, no, not a single minute."

Randy had escaped to the barn where, on the hay, she had laughed until she was tired; all the time feeling guilty, for she knew that, funny as the sight had been, Prue had been very naughty. Prue was a little captive in the house that afternoon, a great trial for her, and at night her father had talked with her and told her that she must always be kind to every one, especially to old people, and Prue had

promised, at the same time saying that, "if Aunt Prudence was always good, it was easier for grown-up people to be good."

Around the house and barn, down by the well, and, lastly, into the barn went Randy, calling, "Prue! Prue! where are you?"

"Here!" called a little voice.

"Where?" shouted Randy.

"Up here!" came the answer, which appeared to come from the loft.

Up the ladder went Randy, and, once at the top, she espied a funny little figure sitting on the hay. "Why, Prue," said Randy, "what are you doing up here? Why didn't you come when I called?"

"I couldn't," said Prue; "I'm helping mother, and I've got to stay. Mother said you could help her make pies, so I came up here and I'm sitting on some eggs. The old hen's left them, and mother said they'd just got to be set on."

"Oh, Prue!" said Randy, "you'd ought to know better. If you've smashed them, won't you be a sight?"



"I ain't smashed them," said the child; but upon Randy's insisting, she rose from the nest, only to show that not an egg remained whole, as her pink calico dress plainly showed.

"Well, *I* never got into such scrapes," said Randy, for once out of patience.

"Now, Randy," said Prue, "don't you talk that way; that's just like Aunt Prudence;" and that silenced Randy completely.

Randy's first thought was a longing to shield Prue, but she knew that her mother wished them always to come to her at once when any mischief had been done, so, a forlorn little procession of two, they walked toward the house.



## CHAPTER II

### AT THE BROOK

THE next morning dawned bright and fair. Randy awoke and rubbed her eyes. "I believe there was something that made me uncomfortable yesterday. Wonder what it was?" thought she. "Don't see what it could have been," mused the girl, half awake. "I helped mother with the baking and swept the kitchen for her, because I knew I ought to, instead of reading that fairy book. Then I hunted for Prue. — Oh, that's it! mother had to scold her, and that always makes me feel just awful.

"She was naughty, and seem 'sif she might know better than to get into such queer scrapes, though she isn't much more than a baby."

Here Randy turned over and looked at

her little sister, who was still fast asleep. "How pretty she looks!" said Randy, half aloud. The sleeping child stirred, and thrust one chubby arm and hand under her short curls. She drew a long breath, which was half a sigh, her eyelids quivered, opened, closed, then opened wide, and she stared at Randy, who, leaning upon her elbow, was gazing at little Prue.

"Oh, Randy! what are you looking at and thinking of?" said Prue, half laughing.

"I was just thinking," said Randy, "that when you're asleep you don't look as if you could ever be naughty."

Prue stopped laughing, and, putting her arm around her sister's neck, she said, "Oh, Randy! I never mean to, and 'most always when I'm naughty it's when I'm trying to help. Don't you know that time when I dropped the platter and broke it all to smash? Mother put down the towel she was wiping it with to look in the oven to see if the bread was burning. I thought I'd s'prise you and mother, and show you



I'd wiped the big platter nice and dry. Just a minute before, mother said it was too big for me to handle, and that just made me want to."

"I know it," said Randy, "I know you mean to be good, and I do believe you can't help doing funny things, you best little sister in all the world," and she kissed Prue, laughing at her at the same time. "Now, do be good to-day, and, if you don't do a naughty thing before dinner, I'll do something splendid. I'll have to help mother this morning, and do a lot of things. Then, of course, I'll wipe the dinner dishes, and after that you and I will go down to that shady place by the brook, and I'll tell you some of the stories I read in that book I found."

"Oh, will you?" said Prue, "can you remember them?"

"Yes, some of them; I can't remember all of them yet," said Randy.

"Why don't you take the book and read them?" said Prue.



“Because,” said Randy, “father’s got to look it over and see if it’s a good book first, mother says.”

“Why isn’t he ’fraid to read it, if p’r’aps, it isn’t good?” said the child, with such a funny expression on her face that Randy, who really did not know how to answer such a question, laughed, and said she thought it must be time to dress.

Up sprang little Prue, and out upon the floor. “You dress me first,” said she. So Randy put on the little one’s shoes and stockings, then, piece by piece, her other little garments, all the time silently admiring the round, dimpled arms, the roguish eyes, and tangle of short curls, and the sweet little mouth, honestly believing that no girl in all the world had so dear a little sister. Just as Randy turned to button the little dress, Prue uttered a joyous cry, and darted over to the window.

“Oh, come quick, quick!” she called. “See the butterfly almost coming in our window.” And sure enough, when Randy

reached the window, there he was, a gorgeous fellow, with bright, golden wings, swinging up and down over a fresh rose-colored morning-glory.

"Oh!" cried Prue, "isn't it the handsomest butterfly you ever saw?"

"Yes, and look at the dew-drops on the pink morning-glory," said imaginative Randy; "I wonder if the necklace that the fairy queen wore looked as bright as that? In the picture in the book it looks just like strings and strings of beads."

"I liked the beads and her dress, with a long train to it; but in the picture she didn't have a nice face 't all," said Prue, the young critic.

"Oh, but she was beautiful," said Randy. "She must have been, the story said so," but just here Randy's raptures over the heroine of the fairy tale were cut short by a loud call of "Randy! Randy! Prue! it's time to come downstairs!"

So Randy hurried on her own clothing, and Prue amused herself while waiting by



counting the buttons on Randy's best gingham dress as it hung on the first hook in the closet, and this is the way she half said and half sung it : —

“ Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief, doctor, lawyer, — Randy, what's a lawyer? Your last button is a lawyer.”

“ I don't know,” said Randy; “ ask father ;” but when they had reached the lowest stair and entered the kitchen Prue had forgotten her question and asked another.

“ Father,” she cried, “ have you read the book yet? Are you going to let Randy read it? the fairy book, I mean?”

“ Two questions in one,” said Mr. Weston, laughing. “ Why, yes, I guess I'll have to let her read it, if she wants to,” said he.

“ Going to let Randy read those outlandish tales?” said Mrs. Weston coming out of the closet with a pie in her hand, which she placed upon the table. “ Why there wasn't a word of truth in them.”

“ I know it,” said her husband, smiling,

“but I didn’t see anything wrong about them, and the yarns that are in the book are so big that no sensible girl, like our Randy, would s’pose she was expected to believe them a minute. I looked it over last night after I’d thought over that piece of medder land of Jason Meade’s that he wants to swap for my little pasture, and cal-lated ’bout what the bargain was worth. I just took down that fairy book from behind the clock, and I thought I’d just look it over to see if it was all right for Randy and Prue, and, if you’d believe me, ’fore I knew it, I was ’most as interested as the children was. As you say, there ain’t any sense in it, but it reads kinder fine, I must say.”

Mrs. Weston laughed, and said that she was willing enough to let them have it if the book was all right.

“Right enough,” rejoined her husband, “only kind of foolish,” and smiling at the children’s eager faces he said kindly, “Read it if you like, only don’t let it make you forget to help mother, Randy.”



“Randy don’t often forget that,” said Mrs. Weston, at which unwonted bit of praise, Randy flushed with delight.

Mrs. Weston was a hard-working woman who loved her husband and children dearly, but so busy was she, that she forgot to say the encouraging word, or give the bit of praise, justly won, which seems a reward to the husband for his care and toil, and to the child for “being good.”

When the hot forenoon’s work was done, and the dinner dishes put away, Randy and Prue started for the brook, Randy carrying the wonderful book very carefully, and little Prue skipping along beside her. Across the fields, behind the barn, into a bit of woodland went the children, and there they found the brook, calm and placid in one place, rippling and chattering in another. “Hark! hear it talk,” said Randy, but practical little Prue said, “It only says ‘wobble, wobble, wobble,’ as it goes over the stones, and I don’t call that talking.”

“Well, I do,” said Randy, “and I always wonder what it says.”

"How'll you find out?" said Prue.

"Oh, Prue!" said Randy, "what makes you ask questions that nobody could answer?"

"But somebody could," said the child; "if it really says anything, somebody, somewhere, would know what it means, now wouldn't they, Randy?"

"I do believe there is some one who could understand it." Randy spoke so earnestly that Prue stopped throwing pebbles at the water-spiders and throwing her arms around Randy, she said, "Oh, Randy! don't look that way. When your eyes get big, and you just think and think, it makes me lonesome. Do begin to read the fairy stories."

So Randy roused herself from her dream about the brook, and sat down, with Prue close beside her, on a rough plank which spanned the tiny stream. There, with the book upon her lap, and one arm around her little sister, she read the tales of wonder and enchantment, while the sunlight, sift-



ing through the leaves, touched her hair and made a halo around the sweet face. Parts of the stories were too much for little Prue to understand, but such of them as her small brain could take in delighted her.

Randy read very well, although she had had but little schooling, and her delight in the splendor which the stories described gave added expression to her reading, and delighted little Prue exclaimed, "Oh, Randy, you make it seem as if it was true!"

Randy laughed, well pleased with the compliment, and continued reading: "And as soon as she heard the witch's voice, she unbound her tresses."

"What's 'tresses'?" interrupted Prue.

"Why, hair," explained Randy.

"Then, why didn't they say 'hair'?" said the child.

"Tresses sounds nicer," answered Randy.

"I don't know," said Prue, doubtfully.

"Well, I do," said Randy. "If my hair was long, I'd enough rather have it called tresses."

"I'll call it tresses," said obliging little Prue, "even if it isn't very long. Now, go on, Randy."

So Randy continued: "'She unbound her tresses, and they fell down twenty ells, and the witch mounted up by them.'"

"Oh, my, my!" interrupted Prue, "your hair's longer'n that!"

"Longer than what?" said the astonished Randy.

"Twenty ells," said Prue. "When you showed me the other day how to print a L, it wasn't very big. Would twenty of 'em be so very much? Your hair is most down to your waist, when I stretch the ends out so they don't curl."

"O you funny child!" said Randy, half laughing, half impatient. "It doesn't mean that kind of ell. What's the use of reading the stories? You ask so many questions, I don't believe you half hear them."

"Oh, I do truly want to hear the stories, and if you'll only read, I won't ask a question, 'less it's something I can't make out."



Again Randy found the place, and for some time the story went on without interruption. Once they paused to see the picture of the lovely girl in the tower, then Randy went on: —

“‘The king’s son wished to ascend to her, and looked for a door in the tower, but he could not find one. So he rode home, but the song which she had sung had touched his heart so much that he went every day to the forest and listened to it. As he thus stood one day behind a tree, he saw the witch come up and heard her call out: —

“‘Rapunzel, Rapunzel,  
Let down your hair.’

Then Rapunzel let down her tresses, and the witch mounted up.’”

“Oh, Randy!” cried Prue, excitedly, “why, didn’t it ’most pull her head off?”

Randy laughed. “O Prue, Prue!” she said, “I do believe you think of the funniest questions to ask.”

“But, Randy, do you b’lieve it didn’t

pull like everything?" And Prue's eyes were round with wonder.

"Oh!" said Randy, "don't you know that father said we wouldn't be expected to believe the stories, only just enjoy them?" But the little girl looked bewildered; so, closing the book, Randy sought other means to amuse her. "Let's play this is a beautiful bridge, this plank we're sitting on, and this brook, a great big river," said Randy, "and we're princesses waiting for a prince to come and save us—I mean rescue us," she corrected.

Again little Prue showed her lack of imagination. "Save us from what?" said she.

"Oh, dragons that live in this big, roaring river."

"It don't roar much," said Prue, doubtfully; "but," she added, "we can play it does."

Thus encouraged, Randy went on, giving her fancy full play. "And that pretty green branch overhead, with sun on the



leaves, that's an arch of flowers such as the princess rode under in another story."

That was too much for Prue. "But, Randy!" she exclaimed, "there isn't a blossom on it. If we were princesses, Randy, I could love you just the same, couldn't I?" questioned Prue, looking up at her sister with eager eyes.

"Of course you could," said Randy, giving Prue a hug, who thus assured began to hum a little tune, swinging her legs to keep time with her singing. They made a pretty picture, Randy with her arm still about the little sister, Prue nestling as close as possible to Randy, and in the brook below a reflection showing the two children. Randy was looking off as if for the coming of the prince, while little Prue, becoming drowsy, laid her head against her sister.

Suddenly Prue started: "S'pose that's the prince?" said she, as a low, merry whistle sounded through the woods. Randy looked toward the opening, then her laugh rang out. "Oh, Prue," said she, "it's 'Bijah

Bowstock, the deacon's hired man, going after the cows. Just look at him!" she added. And Prue looked.

Little enough like the prince in the fairy book looked he! An old straw hat upon the back of his head, a blue "jumper," and a pair of overalls tucked into his boots, completed his costume. He did not see Randy and Prue as he passed through the woods to a path far beyond the brook, whisking off the blossoms with his switch as he went along.

"His clothes wasn't the kind the prince wore in the picture, was they, Randy?" said Prue, when 'Bijah was out of sight. "In the picture in the fairy book they wear such long, long stockings way over their knees, and hats with feathers in them, and everything," said Prue, intending thus to supply all the details of costume which she might possibly have omitted.

Randy made no answer. Little Prue felt as many a grown person does, that the clothes made the man; but Randy, thought-



ful Randy, felt that, given all the fine raiment, 'Bijah never could have even *looked* the prince.

Little Prue edged her way along the plank on which they sat, and at last succeeded in slipping off from the end of the board down to the edge of the brook. There she found bits of bark which she freighted with moss, and then floated them down the tiny stream.

The little crafts, aided by a gentle push, floated out into a placid little pool just under Randy's feet. For an instant they paused, wavered, then turning about they flew over the miniature rapids, made there by three small stones below the surface, then sailed around a bend in the brook and disappeared behind a clump of brakes growing at the foot of an alder.

Sometimes the tiny boats foundered, and the passengers were tipped out into the stream, but little Prue found other bits of bark for the boats and gaily loaded them with moss for more passengers.

"Look, Randy! Look!" screamed Prue, "there's a fine new boat just under your feet. The gray moss is mens, and the moss with the red tops is womens. The red is their bonnets. Randy, Randy! why don't you hear me when I'm close to you?"

Randy shook herself and sat upright, laughing. "I did hear you," she said, "only I didn't think to answer. I guess I was dreaming."

"Well, don't dream in the daytime!" said Prue; "I've sent lots and lots of pretty boats down the stream, and I kept telling you to look, and now I don't believe you've seen one of them."

"Oh, yes, I have," said Randy, "only I was so busy thinking that I didn't say anything about them. Come, we'll sail a few boats together, and then I guess we'd better go home."

Prue was delighted, and to reward Randy for agreeing to play with her, she hunted with all her might for finer pieces of bark and choicer bits of moss, and gay indeed



was the little fleet with its red-capped crew and passengers. Prue wandered off to find even finer mosses, and Randy was trying to capture a big water-spider for a passenger for a piece of birch bark, when Prue came rushing down the path, crying, "Look, Randy! Look! Here's old Mr. Plimpkins to sail in one of our boats."

In her surprise Randy let the water-spider escape, and, turning about, saw Prue quite alone, running toward her, laughing and holding out something which she had in her hand.

"Prue Weston! what do you mean?" said Randy.

Old Mr. Plimpkins was a farmer who lived at the outskirts of the town, but Prue had seen him at church, and she thought him the funniest man she had ever seen.

He was nearly as broad as he was tall. Winter and summer, he habitually wore very broad-brimmed hats, and he walked with a comical waddle, because his legs were completely bowed. As if to attract

attention to these members, they were always encased in light, snuff-colored trousers, while about his neck, hot weather or cold, was always wrapped an immense red plaid cotton handkerchief.

As Prue came along, she handed out to Randy the object which she called Mr. Plimpkins, and, sure enough, clutched tightly in the little hot hand, was a bit of twig on which two stems bowed together until they nearly touched. On it, for a broad-brimmed hat, she had stuck a round green leaf.

"Oh, I think it must be naughty to laugh about him, even if he is funny," said Randy.

"But doesn't it look like him?" persisted Prue, "besides, *you're* laughing, Randy, only not out loud."

Indeed, Randy was laughing, so, without attempting to reprove the little sister, she placed the bit of birch, which represented the old farmer, on the bark, and watched Prue as she floated it down the stream.



Then, turning toward home, they walked along the path which led to the entrance to the wood.

Prue sang all the way, and, seeing her happiness, Randy, sweet Randy, felt rewarded for the afternoon given up to her little sister's amusement; but she felt that the reading of the fairy tales was not a success. Clearly, the stories were beyond little Prue; for, at the supper table, when there was a pause in the conversation, she described the afternoon and Randy's reading, much to Randy's surprise and her father's amusement.

"Oh, father!" she exclaimed, "we've been down to the brook, sailing boats, an' Randy read me the beautifulest story! The girl's name was — I've forgotten what, but her hair comed down to the ground, and the prince clumb up on it, and 'most pulled her head off, and the tower was so small the old witch couldn't live in it, and she cut her hair off, and that's all I can think of, 'cept the girl sang all the time, and the

prince could hear her, and we sat on the plank and waited for the prince to come."

All this she said in one breath. Her father laughed heartily at her manner of telling the story, but Mrs. Weston said, "What on airth does the child mean?" while Randy decided to read the stories to herself, thereafter, and amuse Prue in another way.



## CHAPTER III

### RANDY AT CHURCH

“COME, Randy, come! It wants a quarter to ten, an’ you’d better hurry.”

“Yes, mother, I’m coming,” said Randy, pleasantly, and with redoubled energy she reached for the middle button of her dress waist, which was fastened at the back. This button was just too high for her left hand to reach up to, and almost too low for her right hand to reach down to, but at last she succeeded in crowding the refractory little button into its buttonhole, and, flushed with the struggle, she stood before the tiny looking-glass brushing a stray curling lock from her temple. The glass was a poor one, and Randy’s reflection appeared to be making a most unpleasant grimace at the real girl standing there. When she lifted

her chin, a flaw in the glass made one eye appear much larger than the other, and when she bent her head, you would never have believed that the little nose in the glass was a reproduction of Randy's, so singular was its contour. Truly, with such mirrors as the farm-house afforded, Randy stood little chance of becoming vain.

"Come, Randy!" Randy started, took one more look at the stiff gingham dress, then hastened down the stairs. At the door stood Mrs. Weston, impatiently waiting for her, while little Prue patted the old cat and told her that she "mustn't be lonesome while they were all at church."

Into the wagon they climbed, and away they started to the church. Their progress was slow, for the old horse was far from a "racer" at any time, and on Sunday Mr. Weston felt it to be wrong to more than walk the horse; yet, even with such slow locomotion, they did at last reach the church, and the old horse was duly ensconced in the carriage-shed to dream away the forenoon.



The Westons had arrived a bit early, and Randy amused herself surveying the few parishioners who had already come. In that country town the neighbors were few and far between. The Westons' nearest neighbor was about a mile and a half distant, and so on Sundays it was quite a treat to see so many people.

There were the Babson girls just a few pews in front of Randy. Randy thought Belinda Babson very pretty, mainly because of her fine yellow braids of straight hair. These braids lay down Belinda's broad back, falling quite below her waist.

Her sister Jemima's braids were even thicker and longer; but then, Randy reflected, Jemima's braids were red.

There was Jotham Potts, whose black eyes always espied Randy at church or school, but whose regard she did not at all value. True, on one hot Sunday when Randy had found it well-nigh impossible to keep awake, Jotham had reached over the top of the pew and dropped some big

peppermints in her lap. His intention was good, and Randy blushed and was delighted, although her pleasure was partly spoiled by a snicker from Phœbe Small, who longed to win Jotham's admiration, but thus far had failed to gain it. Randy had inspected every boy and girl in the church and was just watching a big blue fly that was circling around a web in the angle of the window, when a slight stir among the occupants of the other pews caused Randy to look around and become delighted with a sweet vision. With Farmer Gray and his wife came a number of ladies and gentlemen; summer boarders who were to be at the Gray homestead a number of weeks; but to Randy's eyes, the young lady who took a seat next to Mrs. Gray seemed a dream of beauty. She wore a simple white muslin and a very large hat trimmed with daisies, but to the little country maid the city girl's costume was nothing short of magnificent.

It had always been Randy's delight



when the choir arose to sing, to watch Miss Dobbs, the little woman who sang soprano, as she drew herself up to her full height in a vain attempt to catch a glimpse of the page of the hymn-book, the other half of which was held by Silas Barnes, the phenomenally tall tenor. Equally amusing was the tall, thin woman who sang "second," standing beside her cousin, John Hobson, who sang bass with all his might. He was short, fat, and very dark, and his musical efforts, which were mighty, caused a scowl upon his usually jovial countenance, and a deal of perspiration as well.

But to-day when the choir arose, Randy had no eyes for any one but the Grays' lovely boarder, and she almost held her breath as she wondered if the girl would sing.

The tall tenor touched his tuning fork, the choir sounded the chord, then choir and congregation joined in singing the old missionary hymn, "From Greenland's Icy Mountains," and round and full rang out

the sweet contralto voice of the tall, fair girl in white.

Randy was spellbound. She had never admired that hymn, but to-day it sounded sweeter than anything she had ever heard. Little Prue looked at the singer with round eyes, and as they sat down she clutched Randy's skirts and in a loud whisper said, "Oh, Randy, do you s'pose she is the fairy princess?"

"Oh, hush!" said Randy, alarmed lest the young girl should hear the child.

Did she hear her? She sat in the pew just in front of the Westons', and when Prue whispered her eager question, a faint suggestion of a smile hovered about the lovely mouth, and a bright twinkle glimmered for an instant in her beautiful eyes.

Just then Parson Spooner arose, gave out the text, and commenced one of his long sermons. He was a good man, with a kindly word and smile for every one, and all of his people were devoutly fond of him. The people liked him, and he always had a pleasant



chat with every child whom he met, and most of them thought that he was "lots" nicer on week-days than on Sundays. On week-days he talked with the boy whom he chanced to meet with his fishing-rod over his shoulder, and laughingly wished him good luck. Or, if it happened that the small owner of a home-made kite could not make it fly, the genial parson had been known to tie a new bob (usually a few weeds tied together) to the tail of the refractory kite, and off it would sail to the delight of the small boy and his clerical friend.

But on Sundays, his sermons, delivered in a drowsy sing-song, tried the patience of his small parishoners. Prue and Randy settled down as if for a long day of it, and Randy resolved that, however long the sermon might be, she would not get sleepy; whereupon, she stretched her eyes to their fullest extent, and stared at nothing so persistently, that Prue became uneasy, and whispered, "What's the matter, Randy? you look so queer!"

"Nothing," said Randy. "I just mean to keep my eyes open, that's all."

"They *are* open, just monstrous!" said Prue, at which Randy could not help laughing. As the little girl was not aware that she had said anything that was at all funny, she thought Randy's amusement quite out of place, and sat quietly for a few moments, in injured silence.

Randy tried very hard to attend to the sermon, but in spite of good intentions, her mind wandered from Parson Spooner's flushed face, as he proceeded to make his meaning clear by loud vocal efforts, and to enforce his meaning by many thumps of his fat fist upon the pulpit cushion.

Mrs. Brimblecom sat over by the window, slowly waving a palmleaf fan to and fro, and occasionally nudging her husband, to keep him awake. In front of her, sat Joel Simpkins, his sandy hair brushed so carefully that not one hair was awry, and just across the aisle, Janie Clifton sat, in all the glory of a new pink calico. Janie's black curls



were very pretty, and she knew it; and her bright, black eyes had been pointedly praised in an alleged poem, which had appeared in the county paper a few weeks before. It was entitled the "Black-eyed Coquette," and Janie felt sure that Joel had written it, in which case, its boldly expressed flattery could have been meant for none other than herself. Accordingly, she shook her curls, and occasionally looked at Joel, in a manner which Randy considered shockingly bold, and she wondered if, at eighteen, she could act like that. She decided that she could never be so bold, not even if the object of her admiration looked like a prince.

She thought, too, that Joel was very ordinary; then she looked again at the girl in the daisy-trimmed hat and white muslin gown, and fell to wondering how fine and handsome a prince would have to be to gain her favor.

"Probably there isn't any one in these parts that would please her," thought

Randy. "'Tisn't only her clothes," mused she, "it's something else that makes her different from the folks around here."

All this time Prue had been unusually still, and Randy looked to see if she was asleep. The little girl was very wide awake, and sat staring at the large hat in front of her, her lips moving as if she were counting. Prue's manner of counting was something unique, and as Randy bent her head to listen, she could hardly help laughing, for this is what she heard:—

"One, two, four, five, two, six, ten, nine, two,—oh, Randy, there's more daisies on her hat than I can count. Are they truly daisies? If they are, why don't they wilt?"

"Hush-sh-sh," said Randy. "Keep still and watch that big bumble bee that's just come in the window."

"Hear him bum," said Prue, thus making Randy laugh again. She felt very wicked, laughing in church, and knew that her father would not approve; but how could she help laughing, for while she watched









the bee, and wondered where he would fly next, little Prue watched him, too, all the time softly imitating his monotonous tune by saying under her breath, "bum, bum, bum."

The heat increased, and Prue looked out of the window at the green branches moving in the breeze, and longed to be out there, too. At last the bee tired of the church and flew out of the window, and just as Randy was thinking that she could not bear the heat, Parson Spooner's sermon came to an end. He had become entangled in his own eloquence; and seeing no way to extricate himself, or make his meaning clear, he abruptly closed his sermon and suggested singing the Doxology.

After the service Mrs. Gray stopped to talk with Mrs. Weston, and then, to the mingled delight and embarrassment of Randy and Prue, the beautiful stranger turned, and, stooping, spoke to the little girl.

"How very good you have been," said she, "to sit still this long, hot morning.

Do you know I had some candy in my pocket which I longed to share with you, but I didn't like to turn quite around, as I should have had to, to give it to you. Let me give it to you now, and you and your sister can enjoy it during the long ride home. See!" And from a pretty chate-laine bag which hung from her belt, she took a small box of bonbons. "If I give you this, will you give me a kiss?" And she stooped and placed the gift in Prue's eager little hands.

For an instant the child hesitated; then shyly she lifted her face, and as the young girl stooped to take the kiss, Prue's pudgy little arm went around her neck.

Then, turning to Randy, she extended her hand in its dainty glove, saying, "I have seen you and your sister many times when I have strolled past your home, and once, when you were standing near the tall clump of sunflowers, watching the bees, I was tempted to stop and chat with you awhile."



"Oh, I wish you had," said Randy, so eagerly, that the girl laughed merrily, saying, "Well, the next time I am out for a walk and am going up the long hill, I will make you a little call."

Just at that moment Mrs. Weston's friendly chat with her neighbor came to an end, and with her usual hasty manner she hurried the two children out of the church and into the old wagon. Mr. Weston gathered up the reins, and with a loud "g'lang" and a few jerks, the old horse seemed to awaken from his forenoon's nap in the carriage-shed and ambled a few steps, then subsided into the habitual jog.

"Look, mother, just see what she gave me," said Prue, swinging the tiny package of bonbons before her mother's eyes.

"What is it?" said her mother; "who gave it to you?"

"The princess," said Prue, as plainly as she could, considering the size of the bonbon which she was eating. Mrs. Weston

looked puzzled, and Randy, helping herself to a bit of the candy, explained: —

“It was that beautiful, tall girl with Mrs. Gray. She gave Prue the candy for being good and keeping still this morning, and she’s coming to see me soon’s ever she takes a walk past our house, and isn’t she the handsomest person that ever lived?”

“Wal’, I don’t know as I noticed,” said Mrs. Weston.

“Why, how could you help seeing her?” said Randy, in amazement.

“Wal’, I s’pose I did see her, but I didn’t ’specially notice her, ’cept that she was talkin’ to you children, for Mrs. Gray was tellin’ me a new way to make cookies with two eggs instead of four, and I made her tell me twice so’s I’d remember; two eggs is quite a savin’.” But this new bit of economy was lost on Randy.

“Did Mrs. Gray tell you her name?” asked Randy, eagerly.



“Seems to me she said it was Dayton, or something like that, but I was so took up with that two-egg rule for cookies that I didn’t notice.” So, failing to interest her mother, Randy subsided.

## CHAPTER IV

### PRUE'S MISHAP

DOWN the long, dusty road trudged Randy and Prue one hot morning on their way to the village store.

At every step the dust arose like smoke, then settled upon their shoes, making a thick coating like that which whitened the blackberry vines growing luxuriantly over the wall by the roadside.

Randy was far from pleased to be taking this long walk in the dust and heat. She had been sitting upon the rough, wooden seat just outside the kitchen door, reading the beloved fairy book, when her mother had stepped briskly to the doorway, calling her back from fairyland abruptly, saying: "Come, Randy, you must go down to the store after some sugar. I've got my cook-



ies 'bout half done and my sugar's given out, so you must put on your sunbonnet and take Prue, and go as quick as you can. Ye needn't run, only don't waste time."

"Oh, mother," said Randy, "it'll take me twice as long if I have to take Prue, she's so little, and she walks so slow."

"I know it," said Mrs. Weston, "but I've got lots to do while you're gone, and I can't watch her and work at the same time; so you take her 'long o' you, and I'll know she's all right."

Randy took her sunbonnet from its peg on the wall and called little Prue, who was playing in the sun. The child's delight when told that she might go to the store with Randy made the elder girl regret that she had demurred when told that she must take her little sister with her.

Prue laughed with delight, and, thrusting her little sunburned hand into Randy's, she trudged along, scuffling her feet and laughing to see the dust rise in little gray clouds.

At any other time Randy would have checked Prue, but that day her mind was too much occupied with the heroine of the fairy tale to notice Prue's movements or comment upon them; but Prue was getting tired of walking in silence, while Randy indulged herself in day-dreams.

"Why don't you talk, Randy? You haven't talked any since we started," said Prue.

"Oh, it's too hot to talk," answered Randy, and she once more relapsed into silence.

Prue dropped Randy's hand, and, leaving the road, she clambered upon the wall to hunt among the dusty vines for blackberries. There were more leaves than fruit, so the little girl, after finding a few small berries, walked along upon the wall until she came to another lot of vines, where she again searched for fruit.

While Prue looked for berries Randy was critically inspecting her own and her little sister's costume. How ugly they looked!



The girl who, up to that time, had never seen any one arrayed in anything more beautiful than a print or gingham gown, varied by a long apron of blue-checked cotton, or a dark, chocolate-colored calico, now looked with startling dislike upon that style of apparel.

“Only think,” mused Randy, “if we wore white dresses and fine shoes, and big hats, ’twouldn’t seem near as hot doing errands. Seems as though we could sit still in meeting if we had on different clothes and — why, Prue, what’s the matter?” cried Randy, in answer to a doleful wail from the little sister.

“Oh, my foot, my foot!” screamed Prue; “it hurts drefful, and I can’t get it out.”

“Let me see,” said Randy. “Hold still a minute; I can get it out, Prue,” which, however, proved to be easier said than done. While walking upon the wall the little foot had slipped between the stones and seemed firmly fixed.

Randy worked gently and patiently, and

at last the little foot was out of prison. Prue insisted upon having her shoe and stocking taken off, saying that her foot felt "awful big," and sure enough it had become a trifle swollen. Randy tried in every way to soothe her, assuring her that it was but a short walk to the store, but Prue wailed dismally.

"Oh, I can't walk, Randy, my foot aches just drefful, and I can't have any shoes on, 'cause my foot has grown big."

Randy blamed herself for the mishap. "I ought to have been taking care of Prue instead of thinking of fine clothes," thought Randy. "It ought to have been me that got hurt instead of little Prue. 'Twould have served me right for being real silly, almost vain, I do believe." And thus she berated herself.

Poor, repentant Randy! Careless she had been, but surely not wicked. She was utterly at a loss to know what to do. "Don't you think you could walk slowly, Prue, if I put my hands under your arms to help you?" she asked coaxingly.



"Randy, how can I walk when this foot is most twice as big as my other foot?" said Prue.

Randy thought a moment. Then she said: "There's only one thing to do, Prue. You can look right down the road and see the store from here. You sit still where you are, and I'll run and get the sugar; it won't take but a few minutes, and when I get back I'll carry you home in my arms. You can hold the sugar and I'll carry you."

Prue tried bravely to stop crying, and although she declared that her foot felt "worsen," she promised to be patient until Randy should return. The store was in the front part of a farm-house but a short distance from where the two sat upon the wall, and Randy rushed off down the road and in at the open door, in such evident haste that Silas Barnes looked at the girl in amazement.

"In a kind of hurry, ain't ye?" said he, as in his usual deliberate manner he weighed the sugar.

"Yes, oh, yes," answered Randy, as she almost snatched the bundle and darted out of the door and ran up the road to where Prue sat upon the wall, a most disconsolate little heap, trying very hard to be brave, but sobbing in spite of all endeavor.

"Now, you carry the sugar — just think what a sweet bundle — and I'll take you. My arms are real strong, so I believe I can carry you easily."

Prue hugged the parcel, and taking her little sister in her arms Randy stepped out bravely toward home. It seemed to her that she could not remember such intense heat as she that day experienced. They had taken off their sunbonnets as they sat upon the wall, and in their haste they had started for home, leaving them where they had dropped them, so that their heads were unprotected from the scorching rays of the sun, which was now directly overhead.

Many times Randy was obliged to set Prue upon the wall, just long enough to









rest her aching arms; then taking her again, she bravely trudged on toward home.

Just as she concluded that her arms would surely break, she heard the sound of wheels behind her, and looking over her shoulder she saw Obadiah Gray's old mare, Clover, jogging along and in the wagon the beautiful young girl whom she had so much admired at church.

"There's that pretty girl whom I saw in church last Sunday," thought Helen Dayton. "How much prettier she looks without that ugly sunbonnet. Why, she has her little sister in her arms, and the little one is crying. I'll stop and speak to them." Old Clover, always delighted to stop, came to a standstill, and Randy looked up shyly at Helen's beautiful face.

"Are you not tired?" said Miss Dayton. "I see that you are carrying your little sister." Then, as she noticed the swollen foot, she said: "Oh, how did she hurt her foot? Do let me take you home."

Randy was only too glad to accept the invitation so sweetly given; so Prue was gently lifted to a place beside Miss Dayton, and then Randy clambered in, not only thankful for the ride, but positively charmed to be with the lovely driver.

"Now, tell me," said Helen, "how your little sister injured her foot." So Randy told her the whole story, and blamed herself more than she deserved. "If I hadn't been wishing that I had a big, beautiful hat like" — but here Randy stopped abruptly, as she noticed, for the first time, that Miss Dayton was wearing the very hat and dress which so filled her mind that morning.

"What was the hat like? Anything like the one I am wearing this morning?" asked Helen, sweetly.

"Well, yes, just like it," admitted Randy, blushing.

"Did you so much admire my hat?" said Helen. "Well, who knows but that on some fine day you may have one quite like it."



When, at last, they had reached Randy's home, both Prue and Randy had become quite well acquainted with their new friend.

Mr. Weston had just come in from the field, in answer to a blast from the dinner horn, and was as anxious as his wife when told that the children had been gone two hours and a half. "I guess I'll have to harness up and go down to the store and see if they're — sakes alive! Here they be now, with that 'stonishing pretty boarder of Obadiah Gray's," and Mr. Weston hastened down the walk to thank the young lady for her kindness.

"I'm much 'bleeged to ye for bringing the children home; mother and I was getting anxious. Randy, here, is going on fifteen, and pretty tall of her age, but we still call them the children, and Randy, she's reliable; so, when she don't appear at the right time, we know that something's up. Why, Prue, where's your shoe and stocking?"

"Oh, father," said Randy, "you won't say I was reliable this time."

"Now, Mr. Weston," said Helen Dayton, "Randy blames herself for Prue's injured foot, but she has bravely carried her little sister up the long hill from the store, and I think accuses herself too harshly."

"Like enough," said Randy's father. "Randy's conscience is all out of proportion to her size." Then, once more thanking Helen heartily for her kindness, he took little Prue into his arms saying, kindly: "There, there, little daughter, I wouldn't cry any more. You're home now, and mother'll know just how to fix your foot all right; and, Randy, ye may have let yer thoughts wander, so to speak, but you didn't make Prue hurt her foot, and ye've more than made up fer it all by bein' so truly sorry, and tryin' to bring her home. She's a little girl, but she's solid for a girl of your size to carry. 'Stead of blamin' and accusin' yourself, you just help mother to make Prue comfortable, and then you



amuse her with the fairy book, and, may be, she'll forget how bad her foot aches."

"I'll do it," said Randy, delighted to think that she could in any way be useful to her little sister, and so well did she amuse her that in the middle of the sixth fairy tale Prue was sound asleep.

As soon as Mrs. Weston had seen the little foot, she had given it a bath in hot water, bound securely about it a hot bandage, and told little Prue that she must be quite still.

"I will, if Randy will read to me," said Prue. So Randy read story after story, until the little sister was asleep.

Randy sat beside her, intending to read to her again if she awoke, but Prue had cried with the aching foot until she was very tired, so she slept soundly. Once she stirred, and thrust her chubby hand under her head, murmuring as she did so. Randy bent over her, to hear what she said.

"The big stones squeezed my foot, so course it wasn't my Randy did it," mur-

mured Prue. "My Randy wouldn't do such a thing to me. My Randy's just about right always and she—" but here her voice faltered and that which commenced in a sentence ended in a sigh. A bright tear glistened in Randy's gray eyes. How lovingly little Prue held her above the possibility of anything wrong.

"I must try hard to be as good as Prue thinks I am," thought Randy, and, bending, she kissed the little one ever so gently so as not to awaken her; "for," thought Randy, "while she sleeps she doesn't know her foot aches, and when she wakes I'll read or do anything she wishes me to, to amuse her."

And Randy kept her promise. The injury, although not serious, was quite painful, and Prue declared that Randy was "'most an angel," so patient and entertaining was she, reading the same story over and over again if it chanced to please her.

In a few days Prue was able to be about, and Randy was every bit as happy as her little sister, to see that the swelling had



disappeared and the wee foot back to its usual size. There was one story with which Prue seemed the most pleased and which she wished oftenest to hear.

That was the story of the "Sleeping Beauty," but it mattered not how many times she heard it, she never could tell it straight.

One day Prue's mother said that the little girl would be wise if she rested her foot all the afternoon. "I'll sit still on the 'lunge,'" said Prue, "if you'll listen to a be-autiful story called the 'Sleeping Beauty.' I guess I can tell it 'most right; do you want to hear it, mother?"

Now this was a trial to Mrs. Weston's patience. She had glanced hastily at a few pages of the fairy book and had declared it to be "clear foolishness," adding, "if it amuses Randy and Prue, I do'no as I care; but it puzzles me how they can enjoy it."

But, thinking to please her little daughter and make her willing to sit still, she promised to listen attentively to Prue's narrative,

adding under her breath, "I guess I can stand it for once, if it is foolish." So she handed the book to Prue, who declared that, although she couldn't read, she could tell the story better by looking at the pictures.

Mrs. Weston brought her sewing to the window nearest the lounge where Prue sat as if enthroned, and the youthful entertainer commenced at once to tell the story as she remembered it. As Randy afterward said with stifled laughter, "If that is the best Prue could tell the story with the pictures to help her, how much more could she have twisted it without the book?"

"Once upon a time (they all commence that way)," said Prue, "there was a little girl so be-aautiful that folks 'most went crazy who saw her, an' her father was tickled to see how handsome she was when she was a baby; an' one time when she was fifteen (that's what Randy is) — no, I forgot, when the baby, that's the princess, you know, was a bein' chris-chris-christened, there was a lot of fairies that bringed



her presents, and one was mad because she didn't be invited, and she did something awful, but I've forgot what.

"Then the beautiful princess went to sleep a hun-dred years" (here Prue's eyes grew round with excitement), "and she grew older and older every minute — no, no, she didn't. I mean she didn't grow older a' tall."

Here Randy turned hastily to gaze out of the window, and Prue, fortunately, failed to notice her sister's very evident effort to conceal her amusement.

"Then everybody in the house — no, palace — went sound asleep and snored, and they never waked up 'til the prince kissed them — oh, no, he only kissed the princess. Mother, why do you s'pose he didn't kiss anybody but the princess? Shouldn't you a thought he would?"

Without waiting for an answer, however, Prue babbled on.

"They was married and lived happy ever after, and all the folks waked up, and the

horses, and cows, and cats, and dogs, all wagged their tails 'cause they was awake too. Isn't that a wonderful story?"

"I should say it was," ejaculated practical Mrs. Weston. "Nothing less than wonderful."

Mrs. Weston folded the garment which she had been mending, and saying, kindly, "That was a long story for a little girl to try to tell," she went out to the kitchen to make preparation for tea, leaving Prue still looking at the pictures in the fairy book. Randy stole out to the kitchen.

"Oh, mother," she said, looking up wistfully, "I know you think it funny that I can like fairy stories almost as well as Prue does; but, truly, Prue does not tell them straight. They're not true, of course, but they do sound pretty when you read them straight through instead of 'mixed up' as she gets them."

"I know, of course," said her mother, "that Prue has a funny way of telling anything. If you enjoy the stories, I'm sure I



don't care, only don't ask me to read them. I want to read something that's somewhat probable," and Randy was obliged to be satisfied with that.

Mrs. Weston's mind was utterly void of imagination, and to read to her of magic locks, of sleep which, lasting a hundred years, left the sleeper youthful and beautiful, of wild wishes granted, of people turned to stone, and back to life again, simply tried her patience and amused her not at all.

## CHAPTER V

### HELEN DAYTON'S CALL

THE sun shone in at the kitchen window and made a golden panel on the floor.

"Looks like another hot day," said Mrs. Weston, and she paused a moment and looked out at the meadow, where the little brook sparkled in the sun.

"Mother, are we very poor?" said Randy, irrelevantly.

Mrs. Weston wheeled around abruptly in her surprise, and promptly dropped the dishcloth which she held in her hand. "There," said she, "look at that dishcloth; somebody's comin' sure as preachin'. I never knew it to fail."

"Oh, I do hope somebody will, if it's Miss Dayton, if that's her name," added Randy. "But you didn't answer what I asked you," said the girl. "*Are we, mother?*"



“Why, Randy, what’s in your mind? Lately you’ve been dreamin’ most of the time, and askin’ queer questions between times. Are we what? Poor? Why no, I do’no’s we be. Your father ain’t a rich man, but he’s well-to-do. What put it in your head to ask me?”

“Nothing,” said Randy, “only I was wondering what the reason was that all the folks in church yesterday looked so different from Mrs. Gray’s boarders. Was it because they were poorer or was it some other reason?”

“Well,” said Mrs. Weston, as she took the towel from Randy’s listless hands, and commenced energetically to finish wiping the dishes, “I guess we’re as well fixed as any one around here; your father owes nobody nothin’, and our farm’s one of the biggest and best in the town. I’ve heard say that some city folks was rich, an’ I heard tell of other city folks as wasn’t so well off as their clothes seemed to make them out; and as to our lookin’ different,

there ain't any call to dress up any more than what we do now. I tell you what, Randy, to be clean and neat ought to satisfy any one."

To this Randy could not agree, so she wisely said nothing. In her inmost heart she knew that, were she the possessor of an immense hat loaded with flowers, she would not have the courage to walk into church, the cynosure of all eyes. On the other hand, a sunbonnet never had looked so uncouth and unbecoming as now.

The dishes put away, the chickens fed, and a dozen other little chores attended to, Randy was free to do as she liked; so off to the "best" room she flew, eager to brighten it in any way which might suggest itself. The best room was a front room, and the front door, although seldom used, opened from it, showing a little garden in which grew boys' love, larkspur, balsams, and, later in the season, marigolds.

But the front room and the front door were never used; and the little path from



the door-stone to the flower beds was overgrown with weeds, years ago. The side door which led to the barn, the well, and the wood-pile was the proper one to use. So Randy did not open the door; it never occurred to her to do so; but she drew up the green paper curtains and let in the sunlight, and, although the room was scrupulously clean, she decided that the correct thing to do first was to dust.

Between the front windows stood a little table with an oil-cloth cover, dotted with red and green figures. Over the table, and quite too high for any one to take a peep, hung a small, square looking-glass with a broad, wooden frame.

Randy remembered having seen a huge asparagus plume over a mirror in the parson's sitting room on one gala occasion when the sewing-circle had met there, and she had been permitted to be present with her mother. Asparagus, then, would be quite the thing with which to decorate the glass. The parson's mirror had a gilt

frame and a gorgeous landscape above the glass, and Randy felt sure that the wooden frame needed the decoration even more than the gilt one. The asparagus in place, Randy stopped in the middle of the floor, duster in hand, to view the effect. Her eyes wandered about the room, and this is what she saw.

On the opposite wall was a picture entitled "The Tree of Life," on which every known virtue hung pendant from the branches on one side, while every evil of which man is guilty kept the balance on the other.

This picture always served to depress Randy. The tree was a sombre green, and Randy espied Envy printed in large type on that side where hung the sins, and she felt sure that a wee bit of envy had crept into her heart on Sunday, and as she looked at the pictured tree she said, under her breath: "Must have been vanity that made me almost hate my sunbonnet. The parson preached a while ago on the sin of vanity."



Poor Randy! To think it a sin to long with all her girlish heart for pretty things! With a sigh she turned from the picture of the tree to the one hanging upon the side wall. This was more cheerful—an ancient fashion plate in which insipid-looking gentlemen, in white trousers and long, blue coats, were smiling at some waxen-faced ladies whose beruffled skirts were voluminously extended.

She rather admired this picture, mainly because the people in it, at least, looked cheerful. Leaving the pictures, Randy let her eyes slowly wander over the furnishings. As none of her neighbors or acquaintances had carpets, the yellow painted floor seemed quite fine. The chairs were also yellow, and as a crowning luxury, a green enamelled cloth lounge stood in all its slippery grandeur against the wall, beside the door.

Randy liked the lounge, but wished it possible to sit upon it without slipping. While she was wishing that she had some pretty

thing in the shape of an ornament for the table, her eyes wandered to the window, where, looking out into the garden, she could see the tall spikes of pink and blue larkspur waving in the breeze. A bright idea! Why not have some flowers upon the table?

Away she ran to the kitchen closet, and there she inspected everything on the shelves, so anxious was she to find something fine for her flowers.

"Oh, that's the thing," said Randy, "if mother'll let me have it." Appealed to, Mrs. Weston looked doubtful. "'Tain't a vase," said she, "it's my old white and blue spoon holder, an' I do'no how it will look in the best room."

"But you'd be willing I should use it, wouldn't you?" Randy asked eagerly.

"Oh, I don't mind your usin' it; go put your posies in it an' see how it looks."

Surprised and delighted that her mother should express the least interest, Randy skipped out into the garden and came run-



ning back in a few moments with a dozen long stalks of larkspur in her hands. She filled the old spoon holder with water and crowded in the flowers, then away she ran to the best room.

"Oh, mother," she called, a minute later, "do come and see the room." Mrs. Weston stopped in the doorway.

"Wal', I do declare," she ejaculated, "I must say that does look pretty. Why, Randy, you do have a real knack to fix it up so. Them flowers brighten up the place wonderful, and that sparrowgrass just beats anything."

"Oh, I'm so glad you like it, mother! Would you put some on the mantel if you were me?"

"I'd put some anywhere," said her mother, wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron. "I declare I'd actually forgotten how much the blossoms cheer up the house. I used to bring them in when I was first married, but ever sence I've been too busy to think of anything but cookin',

sweepin', sewin', and mendin' from Monday 'til Saturday; but, Randy, if you're a mind to, you may bring in a few blossoms once in a while. It seems like the time when I used to fix up the house, and myself too, for that matter."

Mrs. Weston was a reserved woman, and Randy was amazed that her mother should show so much feeling, and delighted that her efforts at decoration were approved.

"I wish I had something to hang down from the mantel in some way. I don't know how to say it, but I know just how it ought to look." A moment Randy stood thinking with a queer little scowl over her eyes. Then her face brightened, and out of the room she darted, then across the yard to the old well around whose sides the wild morning glory clambered. Lifting her skirt, she filled it with the long vines and hurried back to the house.

She filled a small stone jar with water, carried it to the front room and stood it in the centre of the mantel, and then proceeded



to fill it with long sprays of the morning glory. When all the vines were thus disposed of, she inspected her work.

"There, you couldn't have done better," said her mother, and Randy felt rewarded for her efforts. Then they turned to go back to the kitchen, and there, in the doorway, stood Helen Dayton. Randy started.

"Forgive me for startling you, and also for coming in without knocking. I was out for a walk, and coming up the hill I thought of your invitation. I walked toward the house and was about to knock when this little puss offered to lead me through the house to you."

"I'm sure you're welcome any time, Miss Dayton, and this girl of mine," laying her hand on Randy's arm, "has been so eager to see you again I do'no what would have become of her if you had waited long to come."

Randy blushed, and Helen Dayton laughed and said that she was very glad to be so welcome. Then she chatted pleasantly

with Mrs. Weston "just as if she had always known her," as Randy afterward said.

While she was talking, a little book which lay upon Miss Dayton's lap fell to the floor and flew open, showing a page of bright little sketches, and Randy and Prue stared at it in wonder. "My sketch book," said Miss Dayton. "I am not an artist, but I have a bit of talent and have studied a little, and when I go out for a walk I jot down a part of a birch tree, a few wild flowers, or some tall weeds beside an old wall. Take the book and look at it if you like," she added, as she caught the eager look upon Randy's face.

Gladly Randy picked up the little book. The drawings were not wonderful, only rather clever, but to the country girl, who had never seen a sketch, they were truly charming. Randy looked at each little picture at least a dozen times, always telling Prue in a whisper that she must not put her little fingers on them.



"However did you do them?" asked Randy. "I didn't know that anybody ever did such beautiful things."

"Thank you for liking them," said Helen; "but you must not call them beautiful."

"But," said Randy, "that old mullein stalk looks just like a mullein, and those birches look just 'sif you could strip the bark off."

Helen laughed at Randy's enthusiasm. "Sometime, when I come," said she, "I will make a sketch of your old well."

"Our well!" said Randy, "would that look pretty in a picture?" Helen was amused. "You shall see," said she; "and now tell me who arranged the flowers and vines so prettily?"

"I did," said Randy; "I did it to please you," and Randy, the sketch book still in her hand, looked up into the lovely face.

Helen Dayton laid a gentle hand on Randy's shoulder, saying sweetly, "Thank you so much, but tell me why you so wished to please me?"

"Because you are the very loveliest girl I ever saw in this world," and then Randy blushed and looked down to cover her confusion.

"And because you are the princess," chimed in Prue, who had been still an unusually long time.

"The princess!" echoed Helen. "Whatever do you mean, dear? I am not a princess," and Randy hastened to explain. She told all about the fairy book, and how on Sunday in church little Prue had felt sure that Miss Dayton was the princess of the fairy tales.

"Well, of all things!" said Helen; "now I must assure you, little one, that I am not a princess, only Helen Dayton of Boston."

"But you look like one," persisted the child, looking at her with round, admiring eyes. Mrs. Weston had slipped from the room, while the children entertained their visitor, and as she bustled about the kitchen, doing many things, she murmured softly to herself, "Randy's right, the girl is lovely."



A pretty picture they made — the young girl and the two children — as they sat in the best room, chatting now like old acquaintances. Helen had taken little Prue upon her lap, where she sat looking admiringly up into that young lady's face, while Randy sat beside her on the floor, telling her all her small confidences.

"Randy's such a homely name," she was saying. "'Tain't so bad as Jerushy, but it's homely enough."

"But that isn't the whole name, is it? Isn't it 'Miranda'?" asked Helen.

"Why, yes," said Randy, "and it sounds almost fine when you say it; but, generally, it's just Randy. And there's Prue. Her name is Prudence, after Aunt Prudence."

"Who's just horrid," said Prue, so vehemently that Helen and Randy laughed. After a pause Randy asked, abruptly, "If you belong in Boston, how could you come here to board; Boston's a city, my geography says so, and this is just country."

"That is just why I came here," said Helen. "The spring found me very tired, after a long, gay winter, and I came here to be quiet, and get rested."

"How funny!" said Randy. "I was wishing and wishing the other day that it wasn't always so quiet here, and the other night when father was talking to Jason Meade about buying the big piece of meadow land, Mr. Meade was saying that he was going to Boston for a spell—he's been there once—and he told about the streets full of people, and cars running all day, and teams and everything; and I did wish things would fly around here awhile."

Randy paused for breath, and looking at the pretty, eager face, Helen stooped, and touching the curly head ever so lightly with her lips she said, "Dear Randy, I'll try to stir things up a bit, and we will see if we cannot have some pleasant times while I am here."

"Oh, will you?" said Randy, eagerly.



"I never went anywhere 'cept to a sewing-circle once."

"What will you do?" asked Prue.

"Oh, you shall see," said Helen, laughingly. "We are planning a picnic now," said she, "and if we really have it, I'll invite you, and you shall go with me."

"With you!" said Randy. "I'd love to, but I shouldn't look fit," and she looked admiringly at Helen Dayton's dainty outing suit, and glanced up at the trim sailor hat perched upon her pretty head.

"Oh, you will look every bit fine enough with a shade hat — we shall all wear broad-brimmed hats — and a clean gingham dress," said Helen, cheerily.

"But I've got nothing but sunbonnets," said Randy, "'less father will buy me one next time he takes eggs and vegetables to the village. I mean to ask him to if that would be soon enough," and she looked up eagerly at Helen.

"Oh, yes, indeed," said Helen, "we've planned to have it in about two weeks."

"I want to go, too," said little Prue.

"Of course, dear, so you shall," said Helen, "and now I must be going, but I'll tell you all about the picnic the next time we meet. Do you know where Mrs. Gray lives, Randy?"

Randy laughed. "Of course I do," said she.

"Well, when father brings home your new shade hat, and of course he will, if you wish it so much, suppose you take a walk over to Mrs. Gray's and make a little call upon me, and when you come bring the new hat with you; I shouldn't wonder if I had something with which to trim it."

"Oh, I will, I will!" said Randy, eagerly, "and then you'll tell me all about the picnic."

With sheer excitement little Prue was executing a funny little jig, which reminded Helen to inquire for the injured foot.

"It's all well. See!" and Prue hopped upon that one foot to assure her that it was quite itself again.



"I should call that foot very well indeed," said Helen. Then together they walked out to the kitchen where, bidding good morning to Mrs. Weston, Helen said that she had enjoyed her call, admired Randy's tasteful decoration, and asked if she might borrow Randy once in a while.

"Why, yes, you may have Randy whenever I can spare her," said Mrs. Weston, "'though she seems so took up with you, and so delighted, that when she comes home from a call on you I'm afraid she'll about tread on air."

Helen laughed, and taking Randy's hand they walked together as far as the road where Randy, perched upon the wall, watched her new friend out of sight.

Helen turned many times to wave her hand until a bend in the road hid her from view. Then Randy walked slowly to the house, followed by Prue, and as they walked they talked of nothing but Helen's beauty and sweetness and the wonderful picnic.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE PICNIC

MR. WESTON had gone to market two days after Helen Dayton's call upon Randy. He had laughed heartily at the description of the exact kind of shade hat which Randy wished for, and as he drove off he continued to laugh as Mrs. Weston called after him, "Remember, she wants a white hat; don't, for mercy's sake, come home with a brown one."

"And, father," shrieked Randy, "remember to get a big one and one that isn't too coarse."

"Yes, yes, land sakes! I b'lieve I'll bring ye home a dozen to pick from," and the good man chuckled to himself—he had his own plan for doing Randy's errand. His eggs and vegetables disposed of, he



turned to start for home, when he ejaculated, "Bless me! if I didn't most forgit Randy's hat." Back into the store he went. "What have ye got for hats?" said Mr. Weston. "My Randy's set her mind on havin' a fine shade hat for the picnic, and nothin' but a white one will do."

Silas Barnes reached under his counter and brought forth a dozen straw hats, which he spread out for Mr. Weston to select from.

"Wal', that beats all! Randy and her mother told me just how it ought to look, but I don't see any difference in 'em, do you, Barnes?"

"Why, yes," replied the genial store-keeper, "that one's twice as fine as the other, an' it's worth twice as much."

"Wal', I guess it's 'bout good enough for Randy, then, and I'll take it."

When her father returned that night Randy met him at the door, and with a little cry of delight took the parcel which

he handed her, and she could not find words to express her pleasure when the fresh, white hat lay before her on the table.

"Dear me! Ye might have had one before, if it delights ye so," said her mother; "I didn't think of it before, because most every girl here wears a sunbonnet."

"Well, I've got it now," said Randy, "and to-morrow I'll go over to Miss Dayton's and she'll trim it for me; she said she would." On the following day, true to her promise, Helen gave Randy a cordial welcome, and trimmed the hat with some gay ribbons which, although not new, were very pretty, and to Randy seemed nothing short of gorgeous.

On the day of the picnic no happier heart than Randy Weston's beat fast with anticipation; and with Prue's hand held tightly in her own she started, as they had planned, for Mrs. Gray's house to join Helen.



"Don't forget to take care of Prue," called her mother.

"I won't forget," answered Randy.

Mr. Weston stepped back into the house after watching the children until a bend in the road concealed them from view, and sat down for a moment before going out to the field. "I tell ye what, mother," said he, "I mean those girls shall have a chance. I'd no idee what a difference there was between a hat and a sunbunnit. I say, why don't you have a new bunnit yourself, mother? You were every bit as pretty as our Randy when you were young, and I b'lieve you'd look a good deal the same now, with a little fixin'. Just see the difference in Randy with a bran' new hat! When we was a-payin' off the mortgage we had to scrimp; but now, I think ye might have a few duds, once in a while."

He stopped, expecting a rebuff, and was surprised when his wife turned with a sweet smile and said, "I b'lieve I will have just a few things."

“Ye can have what ye want,” was the hearty rejoinder, “and we’ll go to the village next week and do some shoppin’,” and with a jolly whistle he started for the barn.

When they arrived at Mrs. Gray’s, the children were surprised to find almost every man, woman, and child who had been invited to the picnic already there, and, as they were all talking at once, it was impossible to understand what any one person was saying.

Very conscious of her new hat was Randy, and she longed to find Helen that she might talk with her. She knew that any one with whom she stopped to speak would mention her new finery, so she only nodded pleasantly to the girls whom she passed, and walked toward the house, hoping there to find Helen. Helen saw her and came out to meet her; but as Randy passed the Babson girls, she heard Phoebe Small say to them: “Look at Randy Weston! Isn’t she getting fine!”



“Dunno how fine she is,” responded Belinda Babson ; “but I don’t see as she need walk right by us, just because she’s got a new hat.”

Poor Randy ! She had not the least idea of being vain or silly. “Why need the girls spoil the fun of my having a new hat,” said she, and a hot flush crept up on her cheek, but soon Helen’s merry chatter caused Randy to forget Phoebe’s unkindness, and she was laughing and talking as gayly as Helen herself.

Miss Dobbs, the little soprano of the choir, hearing Randy’s laugh, turned and smiled, an unusual thing for her to do, saying : “How are ye, Randy ? That’s a dreadful pretty hat.”

“I like it,” said Randy, simply, although her eyes showed her delight that some one should approve of it. “Miss Dayton trimmed it for me ; didn’t she do it lovely ?” continued Randy, anxious that her new friend should have all the glory which belonged to her for her millinery skill.

“Umph!” ejaculated Miss Dobbs, “they do say you’re pretty int’mit with Miss Dayton, considering she’s from the city.” Randy moved away, pleased with the compliment for her hat, but hurt by the last remark. “‘Considering she’s from the city,’” thought Randy. “Anybody’d think I asked her to be pleasant to me. Why, I wouldn’t have dared to. She wanted to be nice, and I was glad enough to let her,” and she brushed away a tear and forced back a sob which rose in her throat.

Just then something happened to cheer Randy and give her a wee bit of triumph.

Phoebe Small moved toward Randy and fastening her small eyes disapprovingly upon the offending hat, she was about to speak, when, without noticing Phoebe at all, Jotham Potts walked awkwardly up to Randy, and, standing upon one foot, then shifting to the other, he said: “Morning, Randy! Be you going to walk to the picnic or ride? Because,” he continued, “I told father I’d like to have you ride with us,



seein's we have a spare seat, and he said he'd be pleased to have your company. Will ye come, Randy? I do wish ye would."

"I'd like to, and thank you," answered Randy, sweetly, with a blush and a glance at Phoebe Small, who pretended not to have heard, "but I promised to go in Mr. Gray's team with Miss Dayton, so I'll have to."

"I wish ye was goin' with us, but as ye can't, I'll see ye at the picnic," said Jotham, and he turned to get into his father's wagon; then, stepping back to where Randy was standing, he blushed, and from his pocket produced a little package.

"Here, Randy," he said, "I brought this a purpose for you to enjoy durin' the ride, so I guess I'll give it to ye now."

"Oh, thank you," said Randy, "how good you are," and that so completely overcame Jotham that he retired in confusion. By this time the party was about ready to start. The choir had decided to go in the first wagon and enliven the way by singing,

and were still discussing as to a selection from their scant repertoire.

"Ye needn't ask me to join ye," said Silas Barnes, "and sing 'Chany,'" — he meant China — "for I don't think that's gay enough for a picnic."

Miss Hobson suggested that they might please Mr. Barnes by singing "Yankee Doodle." This was meant to suggest that Silas Barnes was too frivolous, but he did not, apparently, feel injured, as he laughingly answered that he would "rather be patriotic than mournful, and he reely guessed they'd better settle upon 'Yankee Doodle,' as Miss Hobson suggested."

On one end of the door-stone old Mrs. Perkins had just convinced her neighbor, Mrs. Johnson, that it was just the right time of the year to gather 'pennyroyal' and mouse-ear, and so have them a-drying, and Mrs. Buffum had gathered the six little Buffums under her wing by uttering this awful threat: —

"Johnny! Johnny Buffum! do you and



Hitty want to go to the picnic? Katie! do you and Jack and Sophy and Ann want to stay at home? Well, then, come here, or the first thing you'll know the wagons'll go without ye!"

From all directions the six young Buf-fums rushed and crowded closely around their mother. Stay at home from their first picnic? Never!

At last every one had arrived, and they lost no time in clambering into the waiting wagons; then away they jogged toward the grove.

Farmer Gray had taken his wife and Helen Dayton, Randy and little Prue in one wagon, and had told his other boarders that they were welcome to fill his two remaining wagons, allotting places as they chose.

The wagon with the choir had started first, and Randy and Helen could still faintly hear the stirring strains of "Yan-kee Doodle." Randy sat with sparkling eyes, enjoying the ride as she had never

enjoyed one before. Had she not a fine new hat? Was she not beside the beautiful Miss Dayton? and had not Jotham, to the envy of the other girls, given her a package purchased expressly for her?

"What you got in your bundle what Jotham gave you, Randy?" asked Prue. "Will you let me see?"

"Yes, do let us see," said Helen Dayton; "I know it must be something nice."

So Randy untied the package and found a lot of huge pink and white peppermints, which Prue at once commenced to help her eat. Helen pronounced them to be very nice, but as she never liked peppermints, politely excused herself from eating them by saying that she must save her appetite for the spread at the picnic.

Along the dusty road they jogged, Randy never minding the heat, Helen feeling it intensely, even with the protection of her dainty ruffled parasol. Sometimes they rode under overhanging boughs which made long, cool shadows across the road,









then over a sunny, dusty stretch with only a fringe of daisies by the roadside and a chain of hazy blue hills in the distance.

The occupants of one wagon would chat merrily with those in the wagon behind them ; and so, with sunny and shady roads, with laughter and song, they at last reached the grove.

The horses were unharnessed and tethered with a rope long enough to permit them to graze. The baskets of lunch were all placed in one large wagon which stood in the shade of a huge tree. Then intimate friends and neighbors formed little groups and sat under the trees and chatted together, delighted to have this little outing. The children played hide-and-seek behind the tree trunks, and those farmers who had left their work to enjoy the holiday talked over their crops, their cattle, and the price of produce when disposed of at the village store.

The Babson girls were each trying in an awkward fashion to win favor in the eyes of Reuben Jenks, who Phoebe Small de-

clared "had a hull basketful of maple sugar stored away under the seat of his father's wagon."

When Reuben had spoken of the picnic his mother, who was, to express it mildly, a frugal woman, had said that she, for one, didn't approve of picnics. "Folks eat four times as much at a picnic as they do at home, and ain't no better satisfied," she declared; but after much urging she consented to go, saying: "A lot of maple sugar'll be all I'll take. Sweets take away folks' appetites, and folks that eat my maple sugar won't want much else."

But try as they would, neither Belinda's nor Jemima's blandishments brought forward any of the desired sugar. Now Reuben liked the girls well enough, and his boyish vanity was pleased by their evident liking for his society. He was a generous little fellow and would gladly have treated his friends, but his mother's eyes were upon him, and he said afterward, he "just didn't dare."



Jotham Potts, hearing Helen say that she liked water cresses, gallantly offered to go and find some, assuring her that he knew just where they grew.

Helen, Randy, and Prue sat under a large tree, and Helen promised, since Randy was so charmed with fairy tales, to tell some which she knew they had never heard. She told them tales from Grimm's wonderful book, pleasantly answering Prue's funny questions regarding them. When she related the story of the "Gold Children," little Prue's eyes dilated with wonder.

"It's just beautiful," said Randy.

"If they were clear, solid gold how could they move or stir?" asked Prue.

Helen laughed, and patted the little girl's cheek as she said: "Dear little girl, you mustn't ask questions which have no answers. Remember the fairy tales are not true, only amusing."

Having told story after story, Helen became a bit weary, and she proposed that

the children should gather a few flowers, saying that she would twine them into a lovely wreath for Prue's curly head.

Off went the children to search for the finest blossoms to heap in Helen's lap. Soon little Prue hastened back with three large daisies and a buttercup, asking if they were quite enough to make a wreath. "No, indeed," said Helen, "I must have ever so many more."

Away ran Prue, shouting to the children, "Miss Dayton says it takes a nawful lot more." Soon other children came running to Helen with little hands full of buttercups and daisies, until she cried, "Enough, more than enough!" and commenced the weaving of the wreath.

The children watched her dainty fingers, as with airy grace they fashioned it, and when she twined the ends of the garland together, and placed the finished wreath upon Prue's head, their delight knew no bounds.

"Oh, Miss Dayton, you can do anything, can't you?" said Belinda Babson.



“Oh, no, indeed!” said Helen, “there are many, many things which I cannot do.”

Then they spread the table-cloth upon the grass, and “put the picnic on it,” as Prue said. Prue’s idea of a picnic was a lunch out of doors, and until the luncheon made its appearance, she felt that the picnic had not even commenced. Then suddenly clapping her chubby hands, and dancing in a manner which threatened to dislodge her flower crown, she said, “May I wear this wreath while I eat my lunch?”

“Oh, do,” said Helen, “it is really very becoming.”

Every one seemed anxious that Helen should sit as guest of honor at the spread, so, with children on either side, she took her place, and deftly put each one present at ease with her bright, pleasant conversation; now saying a kind word to old Mrs. Dewing, that she might not feel neglected, or laughing lightly at Farmer Morse’s clumsy wit, noticing Randy’s gentle manner with her little sister, and at the same time, with

ready tact, seeming unmindful of the practised hand with which Jack Marden handled his pie with his knife.

So with laughter and gay chatter the lunch was eaten and cleared away, and some one proposed some games.

"Let's play 'On the green carpet,'" said Phoebe Small, and a chorus of voices echoed: "Oh, yes! Let's play that first;" so, joining hands, they sang the old tune as they danced about Helen, whom they insisted should first stand in the centre.

"And choose the one  
That you love best,"

sang the children.

"I choose Randy," said Helen, much to Randy's delight.

"Give her a kiss and send her away,  
And tell her you'll call another day,"

sang the gay little troop, and Helen stooped, and taking Randy's sweet face between her hands she kissed her and slipped from the ring. Around and about Randy they cir-



cled, and then she must choose. She longed to choose Helen, and turned toward her, but Helen said, "We must not keep choosing each other, Randy, because it is more fun to change about," so Randy turned with a puzzled face, wondering whom to choose. Seeing the little sister's eager face, she decided at once. "I choose you, pussy," said she.

Into the ring sprang Prue. "Oh, Randy," said the child, "you did love me best, didn't you?"

"Of course," said Randy; "but now we know, Prue, that you love me best, you choose the one you love next best, because that's the way to play it;" so, wondering much whom the child would favor, Randy left her in the circle. But it did not take dear little Prue a great while to decide.

"Next to Randy, I guess I like you, Jotham, so I choose you," said the child. Every one laughed except Jotham, who, seeing the little girl's lip quiver, said awkwardly, yet very kindly, "You're a nice

little girl, Prue, and I'm real proud to have you choose me;" at which Prue's spirits rose, and, turning with one little hand in Jotham's, she said: "You needn't have laughed if I did choose a big boy. He's very nice, and 'most always gives Randy candy, and she gives some to me."

This so amused every one that they commenced to pet Prue, and, much to Jotham's delight, the game ended, for he felt that he could have chosen none but Randy as his favorite among his friends, and he realized that this would have been a trying ordeal for his diffidence.

Many games they played that sunny afternoon, and so fast flew the hours that every one was surprised when Deacon Turnbull pulled out his great, old-fashioned "timepiece" and declared that it "wanted a quarter to six, and that they ought to be hitchin' up and startin' toward home."

So the baskets and pails were packed into the wagons, the horses harnessed, and the merry, tired party started homeward.



Some of the picnickers were jolly, singing as they went along, others were too tired to sing; but all were unanimous in voting the picnic a success, many declaring that it was just wonderful how Miss Dayton planned it, and that they didn't know when they'd had such a good time. The ride with Helen was delightful to the two children, Randy looking admiringly at Helen all the way and talking little. She was really too happy for conversation.

Not so with little Prue. She sat between Helen and Randy, and all the way home her chatter was interspersed with snatches of the songs which had been a part of their games.

“On the green carpet here we stand,  
Take your true love by the hand,  
Give her a kiss and send her away,  
And tell her —’

That's just the best picnic I ever saw, wasn't it, Randy?”

Before Randy could answer, out rang the childish treble again: —

“‘Sailor in er boat when the tide runs high,  
Sailor in er boat when the tide runs high,  
Sailor in er boat when the tide runs high,  
Waiting for a pretty girl to —’

Oh, Miss Dayton, don't you think Jotham's 'most as nice as a prince? I do,” said Prue, without waiting for an answer, although she looked up in Miss Dayton's face expectantly.

Helen took Prue's little dimpled hand in her own as she said: “All princes are not good, although many of them are very, very good indeed. Jotham has a good face, and I am sure when I really know him I shall like him very much. If he grows to be a good, brave, true man, that is worth much more than being a prince.”

“Yes'm,” said Prue, not quite catching Helen's meaning, yet vaguely understanding that Jotham was fully appreciated. Prue's curly head swayed a little, like a tired flower; and Helen, slipping her arm around her, drew her toward her, and soon the little girl's head lay against her new friend.



Still she sang, although drowsily : —

“Oh, what a beautiful choice you’ve made,  
Don’t you wish you’d longer stayed ? ”

The last line was drawled out so slowly that Randy said, “Oh, wake up, Prue, you’re asleep.”

“I guess I ain’t sleepy, but my eyes feel ’s if — ” she was now really asleep just as they reached Farmer Gray’s door.

Mr. Weston was waiting in the dooryard with his own team to take the children home, and, after an exchange of remarks with Mr. Gray regarding the weather and bluff, but hearty thanks to Miss Dayton for the children’s day of pleasure, he took little Prue in his arms, and, placing her in Randy’s lap, gathered up the reins, and with a resounding “g’lang there” the old mare ambled toward home.

Mrs. Weston was at the door when they arrived. “Well, Randy,” said she, smiling.

“Oh, mother!” cried Randy, “it was just splendid, and we had such good times all day.”

“What! Prue asleep?”

“No,” said little Prue, “I ain’t asleep, but my eyes feel funny, and we had gingerbread and peppermints, and cold sausage and lemonade, and ‘On the — green — carpet,’ and I chose Jotham, and I had a wreath and some maple sugar, and it was all made of daisies and butter — cups — and — and,” but here she lost the thread of her story, and was carried upstairs and put in her bed.



## CHAPTER VII

### RANDY OUTWITS JASON MEADE

THE day after the picnic was a busy one for Mrs. Weston, and Randy, eager to be helpful, was really a fine assistant. She washed all the dishes, allowing little Prue to wipe the spoons, knives, and forks because they would not break if dropped, then she thoroughly cleansed the milk cans and put them just outside the door to dry in the bright sunlight.

"Now, mother, what do you suppose I'm going to do next?" said Randy.

"I don't know," said her mother, "but ye have worked this morning like all possessed."

"Well," said Randy, "I'm just going to bring in towels and aprons from the line and sprinkle and iron them, so's you can sit down awhile after dinner."

Mrs. Weston looked at the bright, flushed face a moment, then said: "I do declare, Randy, you're a real help. There ain't a better daughter in this town, if I do say it."

"Oh, mother," said Randy, "I'd 'most work my fingers off just to hear you say that. I help you because I love you, though somehow I never 'til now could say it."

Mrs. Weston wiped her eyes with a corner of her apron, then, turning to Randy, she kissed her, saying: "Why, Randy, it does me good to hear you say it, and, child, ye must know I'm all bound up in you and Prue. We busy folks sometimes forget to show how much we really feel."

"I mean," said Randy, "to make you and father happy, always; sometimes I forget to help, but always I mean to."

"I know ye do," said her mother.

Randy moved about the kitchen with a subtle sense of exhilaration. Her mother had always been kind and good, but to have her speak of her affection and say a word of approval for her helpfulness, what more



could be needed to make a young girl happy? thought Randy.

She sang little snatches of melody while she cleared the dinner table, and grasped the first leisure moment to steal out under the apple tree, thence toward the brook to the old stone wall. A large stone had toppled from the wall, and Randy sat down upon it to rest. She had intended to make a little call upon Miss Dayton, to talk over the events of the picnic, and to hear what her new friend had to tell her; for Helen had hinted that she had another good time planned, and she promised to tell Randy all about it when next they met.

Tall alders grew luxuriantly almost the entire length of the wall, which served as a fence for one side of the pasture; and Randy, a bit tired with the forenoon's work, easily fell into one of her day-dreams, when she was aroused by hearing voices behind the alders. There seemed to be two voices, and Randy heard them mention her father's name. She was an honest girl,

who, under ordinary circumstances, would have scorned to listen; but something in the tone of the speaker's voice seemed distinctly unfriendly when he spoke of her father, and Randy seemed, against her will, riveted to the spot and obliged to listen. She must have taken her place on the big stone when the conversation was well under way, but the sound of her own footsteps, while unheard by the earnest talkers, had prevented her from hearing their voices. She was invisible to them as they were to her, separated as they were by the alders.

"Now, I've tried and tried 'til I'm tired er tryin' to sell Mr. Weston that piece er medder land er mine, 'n' it would a been sold long ago if I hadn't been bound to swap land instead er taking cash."

"Yes, but I don't see the great pint er not takin' cash ef he's fool enough to pay it," said the second voice.

"I don't s'pose ye do, 'til I tell ye. Ye haven't been here fer years, 'n' only come yisterday, an' ef you was anybody under the









sun but my own brother, I wouldn't tell ye now."

How Randy's heart beat! Surely, it was right to listen now. If any one meant to do her father harm, she must know it and warn him. Nearer to the wall she crept, with a stealth which she was unaware she possessed, and she tried to hush her breathing which came quick and hard.

"Just listen to this, Jim. My wife's just got back from a visit to her folks, I forgit the name of the town, 'though it's on my tongue's end this minute, and while she was there she heard say that they're goin' to run a railroad through this part of the town, next summer, jest a sort er branch road from the one that goes through the centre, and my wife never let on that she was much interested; but she asked 'nough questions, kinder keerful like, and she found that ef they *do* build the road, and she says the folks down that way say they do really mean to, it'll be straight across that little bit er rocky field, back er Weston's barn.

Now, I argy that Weston's got money 'nough, and I mean ter keep at him 'til he agrees ter swap that 'ere little pesky, rocky field er his'n fer my piece er medder land. The more I urge him the less he seems ter want ter swap, an' I even offered to throw in a good young steer to boot, an' all the satisfaction I could git out er him was, 'Wal', I dunno what makes yer so anxious fer that little piece er land er mine.'

"He don't know nothin' 'bout the railroad yet, but there's no knowin' how soon he will. My wife's naggin' me to make him swap, but I'd like to see her try to hurry Weston when he don't intend to hurry; but I tell ye now, ef that 'ere road *does* run through his field, I mean ter own it *fust*, an' I'm goin' up ter night ter talk him inter it."

Randy now realized that the speaker's voice was no other than Jason Meade's. She was but fifteen, but she knew that if her father yielded to his neighbor's urging, it would in some way mean loss to him.



All thought of her call upon Helen vanished, and in its place lay a great fear that she might be seen before she could get away from her hiding place and rush home.

She was a bit cramped with her crouching pose behind the wall. Slowly she arose to her feet, glided along upon the grass, lest her footsteps should be heard, and, once in the grove, she sprang across the brook, dashed through the fields, up the path, and into the kitchen door, where she dropped upon a chair and tried to speak.

“Why, Randy Weston! whatever ails ye? Ye look ’s if ye’d seen a ghost. Why, father,” as the girl did not speak, “jest come look at Randy. She’s been runnin’ ’til she’s clean tuckered out, ’n’ can’t seem to speak.”

Mr. Weston came hastening in from the well with a pail of water, which he set down when he saw Randy.

“Why, Randy, child, what —”

“Oh, father,—the little rocky field behind

the barn, — don't sell it, don't swap it; the railroad's going through it; and oh, father, that's why Jason Meade wants to make you swap it. It's going to be worth lots and lots of money; he can't *make* you swap it, can he, father?" and in her anxiety she sprang up and put her hands upon her father's shoulders.

"There, there, Randy, you've done your father a good turn this time, sure enough, ef it's true. Sit down and tell me where ye heard all this."

So Randy, having regained her breath, told her anxious listeners the tale, beginning with her intended call upon Miss Dayton; how she strolled through the grove and across the brook, and sat down to rest upon the big stone by the wall, with the great alders behind her; how she had, at first sound of the voices, tried not to listen, and, on hearing an unfriendly voice mention her father's name, she had, although afraid of detection, crept close to the wall, to hear if the men really meant to harm him.



Then she had told all that she had heard, word for word, finishing with, "And, father, he *can't* make you swap, can he? he seemed so determined."

Then Mr. Weston did a very unusual thing. Putting his arm around Randy, he drew her down upon his knee, where she had not sat since she was a little girl like Prue, and as he looked at her, with just a suspicion of moisture in his kind, blue eyes, he said, "Mother, we've got a girl to be proud of."

"And to be thankful for," said Mrs. Weston.

"Amen!" said Randy's father, and he added, "Always be as brave and quick to do what's right, Randy, as you have been to-day, even forgetting your own pleasure, and I will trust you anywhere."

Here little Prue, who had been awed into silence by the earnestness of the conversation, found her tongue once more, and piped in with, "Why, pa, my big sister Randy's been good again. How can she be always good?"

They all laughed, and Randy, catching little Prue and giving her a tight hug, said: "I know who's got the best little sister in all the world. I have, just as sure as your name is Prudence."

"I like you to love me lots, Randy dear, but don't you call me anything but Prue. 'Prudence' makes me think of Aunt Prudence, and she looked all so," and here Prue drew down her wee mouth, and puckered up her fair little forehead and brows into such a scowling imitation of Aunt Prudence, that even her father, who did not at all approve, could not help smiling at the dimpled copy of that lady's unpleasant face.

Soon Mrs. Weston had tea ready, and the family had but just finished the evening meal when a loud tap at the door announced some neighbor's arrival. Mr. Weston looked at his wife, with a twinkle in his eye, as he arose to answer the knock.

"Well, well, Jason, come in, come in!"



Thus Mr. Weston welcomed his crafty neighbor.

"How are ye, Square Weston? I thought I'd jist drop in an' see if you'd made up yer mind about that piece er land er mine."

"Well, yes, I hev," said Mr. Weston, looking his neighbor squarely in the face; "I told ye, a month ago, I'd give ye two hundred dollars in cash fer that big medder of yourn."

"I know it, I know you did; but the thing is, I've took a reel fancy to that little rocky pasture er yourn, and I feel 's if I'd lots rather have it, little as it is, than the cash, 'f you'll believe me."

Jason Meade sat back in his chair with the bland air of a man who had done a good deed in praising his neighbor's property.

Mrs. Weston came out of the closet where she had been placing the dishes and stood by her husband's chair, anxiously awaiting his answer. She knew his generous nature,

but she believed that this time he would be firm.

Randy, who after tea had taken the fairy book to the table to read, now leaned forward with parted lips.

Slowly Mr. Weston turned toward his neighbor, and a faint smile played about his lips as he said, "I'll tell ye, Jason, I jist thought that while it ain't so very val'able now, I've 'bout decided to keep it, for when the railroad comes clean through it, I'm thinkin' I'll be reel pleased to think it's my property."

Jason Meade's mouth opened to its widest extent, and to say that he was amazed, astonished, or surprised, would be expressing it very mildly indeed. He cleared his throat and blinked once or twice, then, as no suitable remark seemed to suggest itself he arose, and pushing back his chair, he said "he'd reely have to go as he'd got an arrant to do at Mrs. Gray's." He sheepishly made his way toward the door, and mumbling something about the weather,



he dejectedly stalked out with the air of a disappointed man.

“Why, father,” said Randy, “he didn’t even ask you how you knew about the railroad.”

Mr. Weston laughed as he said: “I guess he didn’t care how I knew. That I knew at all was what worried him.”

## CHAPTER VIII

### TABLEAUX

ONE morning Miss Dayton sent a little hastily written note to Mrs. Weston, saying that she was planning another entertainment which she believed would be as enjoyable as the picnic had been, and asking if Randy might come over and help her make some preparations for the event.

Mrs. Weston read the note, then re-read it to Randy.

"Oh, may I go, could you spare me?" said Randy, eagerly.

"Why, yes indeed," said her mother; "there is less than usual to do to-day, and nothing at all after dinner. Fly 'round and get cleared up, and you can put on your clean red and white gingham and your new hat and go over early."



"Fly 'round!" Randy did fly, and by two o'clock she was off down the road, walking as fast as her feet and her enthusiasm would take her.

What could Miss Dayton be planning, thought Randy, as she hastened toward the farm-house where Helen was staying.

Helen saw her coming and opened the door, smiling at Randy's questioning face, which expressed a world of interest in Helen's scheme, whatever it might be.

"Come right in, take off your hat, and sit down and I will tell you all about my plan for an evening's pleasure. You know I promised when I first met you that I would try to make this summer just a bit gay during my stay here. Now I believe we shall all enjoy an evening of tableaux," but here Helen was obliged to pause and explain just what tableaux were, "and," she continued, "I think that any one of the large girls who attended the picnic, and a few of the little ones, will make a very nice set of pictures."

"Oh, I should think it would be lovely, but," Randy added doubtfully, "what could we wear that would be nice enough for pictures or tab—"

"Tableaux," said Helen.

"Yes, tableaux," said Randy.

"I will agree to furnish the costumes," said Miss Dayton; "they will not have to be very fine to look extremely pretty in the frame. Mr. Gray has made me a fine frame which you and I will cover with evergreen. Then Mrs. Gray has two bracket lamps which we will fasten to the back of the frame to light up the pictures, and I have a lot of odds and ends of pretty things in my trunks which will be sufficiently bright and gay for costumes. Now let us go at once to the barn and decorate the frame."

Mr. Gray's man, Roger, had just brought in an immense load of evergreen. Randy was all eagerness to help, and together they worked all the afternoon.

When she left for home the frame was



thickly covered. There was evergreen and asparagus over the pictures in the "best room" where they were to exhibit to the townspeople their tableaux, and Randy had seen her costume which Helen had designed.

Miss Dayton was an ardent admirer of Greuze, and she possessed many photographic reproductions of his paintings. She also owned a number of photographs of Sir Joshua Reynold's portraits of beautiful women and children, and knowing the bareness of the walls in the average New England farm-house, she had brought these pictures with her to decorate her room during her stay. She intended to copy these beautiful pictures in the list of tableaux which she arranged.

Randy was spellbound when she saw the photographs. "Oh, Miss Dayton," cried she, "do you really think any of us will do?"

"Why, yes indeed," laughed Helen, "I have you all selected now. You are to

be the girl with the broken pitcher in the painting by Greuze. Would you like to see your costume?"

"I guess I should like to," answered Randy, excitedly clapping her hands; so Helen showed her a waist with large, loose sleeves, a kerchief or scarf, and a wide ribbon "to tie up her bonny brown hair."

Randy went home in a fever of excitement. Think of a girl of fifteen who had never witnessed an entertainment of any kind, and you will understand with what delight she looked forward to an evening of tableaux in which she would take part.

Miss Dayton called upon those girls who she thought would like to pose for the tableaux, and every one was invited to be present.

The girls, both large and small, were delighted, and their elders were quite as pleased with the promise of an evening's enjoyment, and every invitation was enthusiastically accepted. Mrs. Gray's attic



proved a perfect treasure room. She generously offered the contents of all the old trunks to Helen, saying, "If you see anything which you can make use of, I shall be truly glad." Mrs. Gray had been a city girl, and had spent the greater part of her married life there, and she brought to the farm-house many trunks containing faded finery, which, while far too good to be thrown away, were of but little use in that small country town. Helen chose those things which she could best utilize and carried them down to the front room, where she deposited them behind an improvised screen.

Randy thought the evening would never come; so did little Prue, for she, too, was to be one of the "tab things," as she called them. She could not remember the word "tableaux."

But the evening did arrive, and with it all the girls whom Helen had drilled for the proper posing, all of the boys who were curious to see the girls "fixed up for

pictures," as Reuben Jenks had expressed it, and all of the farmers and their wives, who were nearly as excited as the young people.

Mrs. Gray and Helen received the friends and neighbors as they arrived, showing them the photographs on the walls and telling them that the girls, correctly dressed, would look very much like pictures when seen in the frame.

The frame was in place with a dark background behind it, and stretching from either side of the frame to the side walls of the room were some old brocatelle curtains which Helen had found in Mrs. Gray's attic. These curtained spaces served as dressing rooms.

Besides the tableaux Helen had planned quite a little programme, and although much drilling had been necessary, each performer was perfect in her part.

Jotham Potts had, after much urging, agreed to read the programme, and Helen had promised to contribute a song, and a



piano solo which should be the opening number.

The hum of conversation rose loud and cheery, and so lively did it become that it was impossible to hear a completed sentence.

“They say your Phœbe’s goin’ to be a dreadful pretty picture to-night.”

“What’s she goin’ to —”

“Wal’, I dunno, seems Miss Dayton thinks our Jotham has a good voice, so she asked him to read the — I forgit what you call it, but anyhow I guess —”

“Yes, Miss Dayton says my hair is auburn and not red, and she says —”

“Why, ef here isn’t Mis’ Weston’s little Prue!”

“Yes’m, I’m going to be one of the tab things, and sing a little tune what Miss Dayton learned — no, taught me,” said the little girl, very proud to think that she had remembered the correction.

“Well, I think she’s real nice to come up here and plan such good times,” but

here Helen tapped upon the piano, and the conversation ceased so abruptly that one might think that the audience held its breath.

The girls rushed behind the curtains on either side of the frame, and Jotham Potts, clearing his throat, read the first number for the evening.

Helen had drilled him in pronouncing those names which he found difficult, and very clearly he read, —

“Our first number will be a piano solo by Miss Dayton, entitled, ‘Marche Militaire.’”

Mr. Potts nudged his wife, saying, in a loud whisper, “Our Jotham did that just like a city feller, didn’t he?” His wife ejaculated “Sh—,” but she smiled and nodded, for she was of the same opinion.

Helen in her white muslin looked very beautiful, as she took her seat at the piano. That piano was the only one in town, and the only one that many of the audience had ever heard. Helen was a good musician, and the piece, grand in itself, rang out brill-



iantly, to the great delight of every one present, and many were the words of praise which reached her ears when she arose. One voice, bolder than the others, said, "That's what I call great; just one more piece, Miss Dayton, ef it ain't asking too much."

This was an honest if unceremonious encore, so Helen seated herself once more, and for those simple country people played a brilliant polacca.

"Wal', 'twas all I could do to keep from dancin', I dew declare," said old Deacon Turnbull, which made every one laugh, as the deacon was a very dignified old man.

Helen rose and saying, "Now, Jotham," she stepped behind the curtains. "Our next number," announced Jotham, "will be a tableau as nearly as possible like the painting entitled 'The Age of Innocence.'"

"That's it over there," said Mrs. Buffum to her husband, pointing at the photograph on the wall, and every one looked that way. When the curtain was drawn aside, there

was chubby little Hitty Buffum, her hands clasped upon her breast, a wee bit of a smile on her parted lips—a very good counterpart of Sir Joshua Reynolds's picture.

“Oh! oh my! She looks just like it. Isn't she cunnin'?” and similar remarks greeted the little girl in the first tableau. She had done her very best for Miss Dayton. Then the curtain swung across the frame and Jotham announced, “The next number will be a song by little Miss Weston.”

“I didn't know as the Weston children could sing, did you?” queried one neighbor, but there was no time for an answer, for little Prue had taken her place on the improvised platform, and Helen was playing a little prelude.

Mrs. Weston laid her hand upon her husband's arm. Would Prue, her little Prue, get through the song without faltering? She need not have feared. Out rang the childish treble in the song which Miss Dayton had taught her. How fresh and clear the little voice sounded!



“ Sometimes I am a daisy bloom,  
I make believe 'tis true,  
I play that all I ever eat  
Is early morning dew.

“ Sometimes I am a butterfly, —  
Just see my gauzy wings!  
Sometimes I play I am a bird,  
Who only sits and sings.

“ But always I am mama's girl,  
And papa's girlie, too,  
And next to them I love the best,  
I love each one of you.”

Putting up her dimpled hands she daintily kissed her finger tips, made a very cunning little bow, and tripped back to Miss Dayton, saying, “ Did I do it nice ? ”

“ Just splendid, little Prue,” said Jotham.

“ Couldn't have been better,” said old Mrs. Green.

Then Prue crept up on her father's lap to see “ all the other tabs,” she said.

“ The ‘ Chapeau Blanc,’ which Miss Dayton says means the White Hat,” announced Jotham. This time the curtain swept aside

to disclose Phoebe Small's little face beneath a hat with white gauzy ruffles upon the brim, and a feather held in place by a knot of blue ribbon. A pearly kerchief about the shoulders was most becoming to Phoebe, whose usually expressionless face looked almost piquant under the saucy white hat and feather.

"Don't she look like a photograph?" whispered Mrs. Small, "and a good deal nicer, if I do say it as shouldn't," and Mrs. Small looked around with a sniff at those present who possibly thought their daughters prettier.

Now, Phoebe's principal defects were an abundance of freckles, and an absence of character in her small face; but the costume was becoming, and the freckles not apparent in the light in which she was posed; so her heart was delighted with words of commendation, and she hoped that Jotham Potts had seen her tableau.

As a matter of fact, Jotham had not seen her; for, having announced that number,



he had sat down and waited for Miss Dayton to appear. The next number on the programme was his, and now Helen stepped from behind the curtain to announce it.

"We will now listen to a solo by Jotham Potts."

"Oh! oo! oo! Does your Jotham sing?" asked Mrs. Brimblecom of Mrs. Potts.

"Why, no; leastways I never heard him," said Jotham's mother, with a twinkle in her eyes, for did she not know of Jotham's evenings spent in practising this very solo with Miss Dayton's accompaniment?

Randy had said one day to Helen, "You'd ought to hear Jotham Potts whistle. He does it just splendid. It sounds just like the brook rippling."

When Helen made her plans for the entertainment, she invited him to give a whistling solo.

"Oh, I'd do anything to 'blige you, Miss Dayton, but who'd want to hear me whistle?" said Jotham.

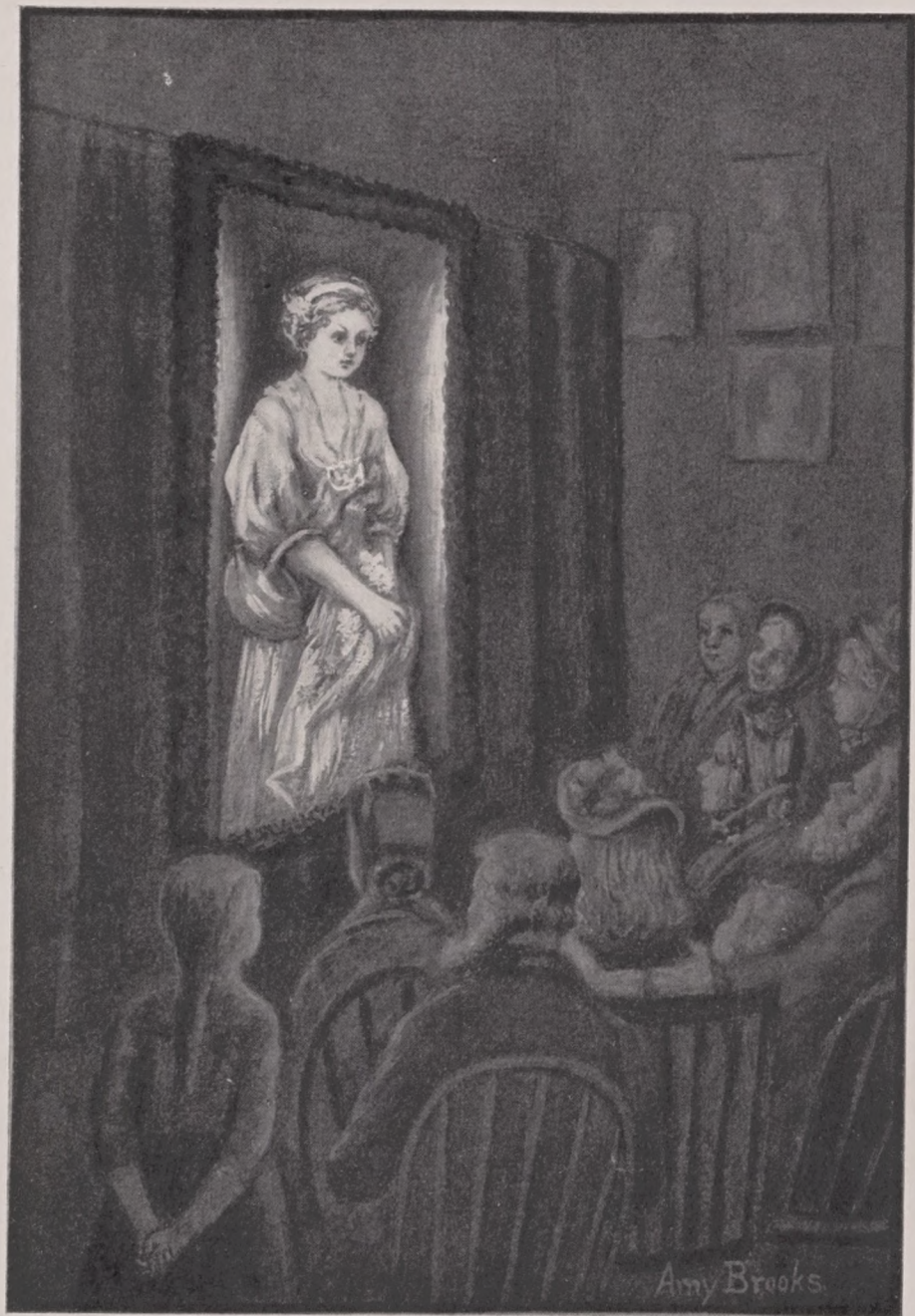
Then Helen told the boy how many people gave whistling solos in the city, with a piano accompaniment, and Jotham consented to "jest try it" with the piano.

After announcing the number, Helen seated herself, and played a pretty little prelude, and then Jotham commenced to whistle a simple piece which Helen played, called "The Alpine Echo," in which there was an imitation of an Alpine horn, followed by echoing notes an octave higher.

Jotham was, indeed, a charming whistler, and as his courage rose, his notes sounded true and flutelike, making the song and echoes, the piano ever aiding him, until with a final thrill and flourish he finished his solo, and, blushing and bowing, retired.

The little assembly was much excited and there were repeated calls for one more whistling solo, and cries of "fine," and "that beats all," and "whistle just once more, Jotham." So Helen resumed her seat at the piano, and this time Jotham whistled









a medley in which were heard "The Girl I Left Behind Me," "Yankee Doodle," and "The Star-Spangled Banner."

"Hooray for Jotham and Miss Dayton, I say!" shouted Reuben Jenks, and everybody cheered.

Jotham was very happy over his musical success, and with a beaming face he announced, "Our next tableau is a copy of the large photograph on the right wall called 'The Broken Pitcher,' by Greuze."

This time the curtain drew aside and there stood Randy, sweet Randy, as the demure little maid with the broken pitcher hanging to her wrist, her beautiful hair loosely bound, and her large gray eyes looking out at one for all the world like the Greuze model.

"Isn't she lovely, mother?" said Jotham, who had stolen out in front of the frame in order to make sure of seeing this tableau.

"Well, I must say, she is," said Mrs. Potts. "She's always a pretty girl, but I

do declare to-night she's nothin' short of handsome."

"So I say," said Jotham, and even Randy's parents were surprised at her beauty. The tableau was recalled, and this time Randy blushed most becomingly because of the encore.

"Oh, do see my Randy!" called little Prue, who had been nodding when the tableau was first shown, and awoke with a start to see her dear Randy looking out from the frame.

"The next number will be a solo by Katie Buffum." Immediately wee Katie was in position. She was not diffident in the least, and clasping her chubby hands she at once piped up with cheery voice:—

"Once there was a little mouse  
No bigger than my fumb;  
He crept into my pocket,  
Where he hunted for a crumb.

"I put my finger in there,  
Just to see what there was in it;  
But the little mouse was naughty,  
And he bit me in a minute."



This solo, so cunningly sung by the pudgy little mite, "brought down the house," and little Katie and her family were delighted with the praise which she received. Still the little girl stood upon the platform until the audience began to think that she wished to sing another verse.

"Go on, Katie," called her brother Jack, "what yer waiting for?"

"I forgot somefin and I dunno what. Oh, yes, I do. It's dis," and, making a comical little bow, this very conscientious little soloist left the platform, feeling that now her performance was complete.

Every one laughed and gave Katie more praise, and she curled up in her mother's lap, feeling her wee self to be a very successful singer.

"We will now look at a tableau called 'Titian's Daughter,'" announced Jotham.

Away flew the curtain and Jemima Babson stood in the fine pose, copying to perfection the engraving of that subject. Jemima was resplendent.

“Oh! oh!” ejaculated every one. A glint of bright light shone in her eyes. She had liked that picture better than any which Miss Dayton had shown the girls when they had called for the first rehearsal, and was delighted when Helen chose it for her tableau.

Next came her sister Belinda as the “Magdalene.” Belinda always wore her yellow hair in braids, but to-night it shone like rippling gold over her shoulders. With her blue eyes uplifted, and the shimmering mass of yellow hair, who could believe that the “Magdalene” was Belinda Babson, the girl who climbed every apple tree in her father’s orchard, and laughed at chance passers-by from the highest branches.

“A solo by Miss Dayton will close the entertainment.”

Helen had sung at church with the congregation, but until to-night no one, not even Randy, had heard her sing a solo.

Ah, how sweet and clear sounded her



voice as, looking across at old Sandy McLeod, she sang "The Bluebells of Scotland."

The proverbial pin could have been heard had it been dropped. As the last notes ceased, old Sandy arose, and, stoutly thumping on the floor with his cane, shouted, "Well, noo, that's bonny, say I, Sandy McLeod."

"That's so," said little Reuben Jenks, under his breath, for he sat quite near old Sandy and was a bit afraid of him. The old Scotchman owned a large farm on the outskirts of the town and was reported to have a deal of money, which most people said he never spent. He lived alone and was said to be rather crusty.

One day, when out for a walk, Helen, in passing his door, saw old Sandy sitting on his door-stone, trying to thread a needle. Helen paused for a moment, saying kindly, "Please let me thread it for you."

The old man scowled and hesitated, then surrendered the needle. Helen threaded

it; then, after a few pleasant words, resumed her walk.

The old fellow mumbled something, possibly thanks, and ever after that morning pulled off his cap to Helen when he met her.

Mrs. Gray laughed when Helen said she intended to invite him to the entertainment, saying that he would never come. He came, however, very promptly, and it was for him she sang the old Scotch ballad.

"Now," said Helen, "let us all sing, 'Should Auld Acquaintance be Forgot,'" and with a will they sang it, old Sandy joining in the chorus.

It was now quite late, but good old Parson Spooner rose and proposed three cheers for the young lady who had planned such a beautiful entertainment. They were given heartily, and then every one crowded around Helen to clasp her hand and thank her again, and of all the merry party no one was happier than she.

Turning to Mrs. Gray, after the last



guest had departed, Helen said, "I have often helped to entertain, with some success, but in the city one does not always feel the thanks so enthusiastically expressed to be sincere, but who could doubt the genuineness of the kind words spoken to-night?"

## CHAPTER IX

### CALLERS

“RANDY, wake up!”

“Yes, oh yes, in a minute,” Randy answered, drowsily.

“No, now, Randy, wake up now! I want to talk about those tab things what we had last night,” and two little soft arms wound their way about sleepy Randy’s neck.

Randy rubbed her eyes, laughing as she said, “Do call them tableaux, Prue, can’t you remember that? Tableaux, Prue, say so.”

“Tabby-lows!” shouted Prue. “How’s that?”

“Better,” said Randy, still laughing.

“Well, whatever you call ’em, yours was the prettiest, Randy dear, the very prettiest, and Jotham said so, too, so of



course it's true," said little Prue, who had been sitting up in bed in order to see her sister's face when she repeated the compliment.

"Now, Prue," said Randy, "did he say that because you asked him?"

"Why, no," said the child, whose smiling face now assumed an injured expression. "He didn't say it to me 'tall. He said it to his mother; I heard him, and she said she thought so, too, I heard her; she sat just behind us. Now, Randy Weston, I thought it was real nice to tell you, and that's what I waked you up for."

"It's all very nice," Randy answered, "that you liked my picture best; and do you know, little sister, I would rather have you pleased than almost any one, next to father and mother."

"Why?" questioned the little girl, in genuine surprise.

"Because," said her sister, "you're a little girl who means just what she says."

"Yes, I do mean it, Randy dear; you did

look just the best of any one, but you'd ought to seen Jotham," she continued, "he meant it, too. He meant it just *tremendous*!"

"Well, Jotham's kind, too," said Randy; then, with a happy little sigh, she turned a smiling face to little Prue as she said, "'most every one's good, I do believe."

"Not near as good as you, Randy," said Prue, thoughtfully; but, she added, brightening, "I mean to be good all day, 'cause why do you s'pose, Randy? 'Cause I had such a good time last night."

"That's a good reason," said Randy. Soon Randy proposed dressing, and at the breakfast table Prue resumed the conversation with which she had awakened Randy.

All agreed that it had been just a lovely evening, but the little girl was not quite satisfied.

"Well, now, we did have a splendid time," said she, "but I want you to say my Randy was just the best of all."

"Why, of course, we say so," said her



father, laughing; "but who sang a nice little song?"

"Oh, I 'most forgot, I sang a little tune and so did Katie Buffum."

"So you did, so you did," said her father, "and your mother and I thought you little girls did your parts well."

"I think they all did wonderful," said Mrs. Weston. "I was jest proud of my girls, and my neighbors' children, too. I do declare, I believe Miss Dayton can do anything. Last evening jest did me good. Well, this won't do for me," she added, "there's a sight to do to-day."

"We'll help," said Randy and Prue together.

"I guess I'll have to have you help me, Randy, if you're a mind to."

"Me too, me too," cried Prue.

So Randy filled a large pan with hot water and Prue armed herself with a long towel, and the two commenced work as if their lives depended upon it.

Mrs. Weston was an energetic woman

and soon her pies were made and baked, and standing to cool upon the table. The children had worked bravely all the forenoon, Randy doing a great deal to be helpful, and Prue assisting in many small things. Randy was just thinking that she would surely scorch if she remained in the hot kitchen another minute, when such an interesting thing happened.

Up the well-trodden path to the kitchen door came Mrs. Hodgkins, "the best woman in town and the newsiest," as Silas Barnes had described her.

The children were always delighted to see her coming, as a call from Mrs. Hodgkins meant numberless scraps of gossip, and in a small country town where neighbors are few and far between, anything in the shape of news is welcome.

Laboriously the good woman stepped from door-stone to threshold, and voluminously filling the wooden rocker which Mrs. Weston offered her, she fanned herself with her handkerchief, ejaculating between gasps



for breath, "Lor' me! How hot it is! Ef I ever get my breath again, I'll try ter talk a spell." But it would have been something greater than shortness of breath that could have completely silenced Mrs. Hodgkins. A few energetic movements of the palm-leaf fan which Randy offered her, a few moments of jerky rocking in the old wooden rocker, and she was ready to begin.

"Well there, Mis' Weston, I b'lieve I can talk now," said she. "Joel was goin' over to the barn raisin', an' I told him I didn't care nothin' 'bout seein' it; but ef he'd a mind to drive me as fur as your house, I'd call in an' look at yer a spell, 'n' I can't spare the time to talk 'n' not do somethin' at the same time," and she drew from a capacious bag an old woollen stocking, saying, "I thought I'd bring my knittin' along and p'haps git this stockin' footed down while I was talkin'."

"Why, that's a woollen stocking," said little Prue. "Lor' yes, child, it's one of Joel's winter stockin's. I was up attic yes-

terday huntin' over my rag bag, 'n' I came across a lot of his old winter stockin's that I'd 'bout decided to throw away, 'n' I says to myself, 'Sophrony Hodgkins, that's downright wasteful,' 'n' I've just set myself a task to foot 'em down 'fore winter." Her needles clicked furiously, and she knit around several times before she spoke again. With her brows contracted she worked until she felt sure that her knitting was "straightened out," then she paused for a chat.

"Did you know," she commenced, "that Phoebe Small was a beggin' an' a teasin' her pa to send her to boardin' school? Well, she is, 'n' none of the girls could find out what put it in her head ter want ter go 'til Jemima Babson teased it out of her. Seems at the picnic Miss Dayton, in some story she was tellin' the children, let out that she went away from home ter school, 'n' Phoebe got the idee that ter go away ter school would jest be the makin' of her. Jemima don't care what she says,



an' she up an' told Phoebe that it 'would take more 'n boardin' school to make her as sweet as Miss Dayton,' all of which was true, but not ter Phoebe's likin'."

"*Is she going to boarding school?*" asked Randy.

"Land, no! Her ma told her to wait 'til she'd learned all there was ter learn at our deestic' school 'fore she talked 'bout goin' anywhere else; and that 'bout finished it."

Here Mrs. Hodgkins, who had said all this without stopping, paused to take breath. "I shouldn't like my girls to be away at boardin' school," said Mrs. Weston, "and I think Mrs. Small would feel 'bout as I do."

"An' there's Mrs. Buffum," continued Mrs. Hodgkins, "with all her children, 'n' she says they've got to be where she can see ter them, an' git their larnin' ter home, and now I'll tell yer the joke. It seems Miss Dayton laughed when she heard about it, for she wasn't at boardin' school at all; she was at school, and was boardin' at a

big hotel with her aunt, 'n' the hotel was near the school. But there, ye know Phoebe Small never gits anything more 'n half right.

"But I'll tell ye somethin' worth tellin'. Old Sandy McLeod's comin' to meetin'!"

"You don't say!" ejaculated Mrs. Weston, lifting her hands, and letting them fall upon her lap, thereby showing the surprise which Mrs. Hodgkins thought this piece of news deserved.

"Well, you see, it was this way," continued the bearer of this pleasant bit of gossip; "it commenced with Miss Dayton's doin' a few little things fer him. Nobody b'lieved fer a minute that he'd come to Mrs. Gray's, to the entertainment; but Miss Dayton asked him in her pretty way, and he hadn't the heart ter refuse ter come, 'n' he had such a nice evenin', and heard her sing that Scotch song, and all, 'n' he says now he's made a great mistake stayin' off by himself so long. An' he's been to Parson Spooner and, ef you'll believe it, hired



a whole pew, sayin' he could well afford to; en' he says that as there's only one in his family, any one that wants ter can sit in his pew, any time.

"He says he always went ter church, though he calls it 'kirk,' or something like that, when he was a young man and lived in Scotland; an' he says, rain or shine, we'll see him in his place every Sunday, after this. When somebody asked him what made him think of goin' ter church again, he drew that great rough hand of his across his eyes, and jist said, 'It's all the doin' of that lass,' meanin' Miss Dayton. And let me tell yer somethin' queerer than that! Did ye notice old Nathan Lawton the other night?

"My! how his eyes twinkled when the children were singin'. Ye know he's dreadful fond of children; but ye know, too, ef ye know anything, that he's tighter 'n the bark of a tree. Well, Miss Dayton heard say what a bad room fer heatin' that schoolroom was, and how the little

buildin' was kind er fer off fer most of the children.

“ Wall, after we'd seen all the pictures, or what yer call 'ems, and she'd sung her song so sweetly, old Nathan spoke ter her, an' thanked her for the pleasant evenin', sayin' he'd do most anythin' ter obleege her, in return, as ye might say, fer his enjoyment; and I had ter laugh softly ter myself when she put her little white hand on his arm and said she thought nothin' would please her so much as ter think, when she went home, that the children here would start ter school in a comfortable, warm room, 'specially ef it could be one that was handy for them all; and she asked him, as one of the see-lect-men, ter manage it some way.

“ He just took one look at the smilin' face lookin' up at him, and then and there offered the use of that front room of his'n, and promised ter keep it roastin' warm all winter, from his own wood-pile. His house is just about the handiest ter every one of



any house in town, and I do say that was a han'some offer.

"Any other folks might have asked him 'til they got tired askin'; but he couldn't refuse her, 'n' I don't wonder. She's just done us a world of good this summer, 'n' in such an easy, pretty way that we've just enjoyed it.

"And now I've come ter what fetched me here ter day. Mrs. Gray said ter me that Miss Dayton never went to an apple-bee; and I was thinkin' she got up that picnic, and that splendid evenin' with the music," — "and tab things," said Prue, — "an' I've been thinkin' it's 'bout time we got up somethin' fer her," said good Mrs. Hodgkins, and she beamed upon Mrs. Weston and Randy as she waited for their approval.

"I think so too," said Randy and her mother together; "but do you think that she would enjoy an apple-bee?"

"Well, we couldn't get up anything fine," said Mrs. Hodgkins; "but they do

say that our apple-bees are 'bout the best that they have anywhere 'round here."

Mrs. Weston thought a moment, then said: "Our house is the biggest in the neighborhood, an' Miss Dayton has been so kind to Randy and Prue that I'll say we'll have the apple-bee here, and I think we'll try extry hard to make it a pleasant one. I'm real glad you thought of it, Mrs. Hodgkins. I think we'll all enjoy it, an' if Miss Dayton does, that's all we'll ask for."

"Well, ef here ain't Joel," said Mrs. Hodgkins, "an' I'll have ter be goin'; but I'll come over an' help ye git ready for the apple-bee, so good-by 'til I see ye again," and she hastily took her departure, puffing down the walk like a small engine, and clambering into the wagon beside her husband. "Good-by, I'll be over ter help ye," she cried, looking back; then they jogged off down the road.

Randy and her mother turned from the doorway and walked back into the kitchen. "Look at that clock, Randy!" exclaimed



Mrs. Weston ; " I guess it'll be a funny dinner to-day," and she commenced to make hasty preparations for the noon meal.

Mr. Weston laughed good-naturedly when he heard of the forenoon caller, and in consequence the " picked-up dinner." " Lots of folks haven't as good a dinner as this, mother," said he, " and I must say, I'm glad she came in ter talk ter ye and so make ye stop workin' a spell. Where is Prue ? "

Sure enough, the little girl who was always eager to tell a part of any happening was, for once, not in evidence. So busy had Randy and her mother been, preparing the dinner, that Prue had not been missed.

" She went out when Mrs. Hodgkins went, don't you remember, mother ? " said Randy. " She ran down the path, waving her hand and saying good-by when they drove away."

" Well, Randy, run out and find her, and tell her ter come in ter dinner. Dear me ! I hope she hasn't got inter some scrape."

She's been out of sight long enough fer anything." Out rushed Randy, calling loudly, "Prue! Prue! where are you?"

"I'm right here, and I'm very busy," came an answering shout from behind the house.

Around the house ran Randy, and such a funny sight she saw!

"Why, Prue Weston, you naughty girl!" said Randy in dismay.

"I ain't naughty," said the child.

"You are, too," responded Randy, "to plague kitty like that. You just take her out of that rain-water tub this minute! If she wasn't the best old cat in the world, she would have scratched you well for ducking her like that."

Prue tried to lift pussy out, and Randy ran to help her.

Poor pussy! If Randy had been a few minutes later, she must surely have been drowned, for, just as Randy arrived, Prue was holding Tabby's head under water "to let it soak," she said.



“What ever made you do such a thing?” questioned Randy, when the cat was once more on dry land; “don’t you know that in a few minutes more you would have drowned her?”

“Drowned!” said Prue in a horrified whisper, “drowned, did you say, Randy?”

“Why, of course,” said Randy, impatiently; “don’t you *know* she’d drown with her head under water?”

“Why, Randy, that’s awful!” said Prue. “I didn’t mean to hurt Tabby. I only meant to help her. She comed down from the field what’s been burned over, and she was all smutty, and I thought I’d give her a good washing; so I put her in the tub, but the smut sticked awful, and I thought I’d soak her and p’rhaps she’d wash easier; and, Randy, whatever you say, she *isn’t* drowned one mite. Just see her washing herself dry in the sun.”

“Oh, Prue, Prue!” said Randy, “what shall I do with you? You do the queerest things! Go tell Tabby you’re sorry this

minute. If kitty had died, just think how you'd felt."

"Now, don't you make me cry, Randy," said Prue, "'cause you know I love Tabby, and I didn't mean to hurt her."

The cat was an unusually placid animal, or she never would have permitted a little girl to do such a thing. Prue had always used her for a doll, dressing her up in all sorts of things, and sometimes dragging her about in a wooden box which she called a "carriage." This alleged vehicle was an old soap box, beautifully padded with a woollen shawl. It had neither wheels nor springs, and as little Prue dragged it along, it thumped over twigs and stones with the most surprising jolts. Pussy, however, seemed to have a species of lethargy, for she slept through it all; so Prue insisted that she liked the ride. The family declared the cat to be absolutely without vim; but that deficiency in her make-up made her a delightful plaything for Prue.



After dinner Mrs. Weston talked long and seriously with her little daughter, telling her that as pussy was so gentle and willing to be played with, she ought to be very kind to her and never do anything that Tabby would not like.

"But I wanted Tabby to be clean in time for the folks to see her when we have the apple-bee," said Prue.

"Oh, she'll be clean as clean can be by that time," said her mother, smiling. "She'll have a whole week to wash in. I think that when you wish to do something to kitty different from what you've done before, you'd better come and ask me first."

"I will," said the little girl, promptly, and Mrs. Weston knew that pussy was safe from any new torment, for Prue always kept her word, and she loved Tabby dearly.

Early in the afternoon, as Mrs. Weston sat by the window mending, another wagon stopped at the door; and this time a tall,

angular woman came up the path with nervous haste. The door was open, and without waiting to knock, the caller walked in and seated herself.

"There, I guess you're s'prised to see me, Mis' Weston, but I jest had ter come."

"Well, I am surprised," responded Mrs. Weston; "but I'm just as pleased ter see ye. Take off yer bunnit."

"I'll take it off jest ter show it ter ye," said Mrs. Jenks. "I thought I'd had change of heart years an' years ago, but I guess I've jest got it now."

"Do tell! Why, Mrs. Jenks, how ye talk," and in blank amazement Mrs. Weston stopped mending, the stocking, however, still drawn over her hand.

"Well, ye might as well stop mendin' an' listen, fer I've come ter tell ye quite a story. It all began with this bunnit. I stepped over ter Mis' Gray's one mornin' of an arrant, an' I chanced to say something about not havin' a decent bunnit fer Sunday, an' I said I had a bunnit



I'd bought down ter Barnses and quite a lot of old ribbon that was plenty good enough to trim it with ; but, says I, I've no more idee how to trim it than a cat. Miss Dayton was just comin' in the door with a lot of wild flowers and green stuff, and she offered, so sweetly, to call over in the afternoon and jest tack the ribbons on fer me that, some way, I had ter let her do it.

“Well, she came over and I got out my ribbon — it was that I had on a blue dress of mine once — and she sat down to trim it. It took some time, and to this day I don't know how it came about, but the first thing I knew she was a-makin' me see how much better it was to give rather than receive. Now I've been pretty 'near' and savin', but I never meant ter be mean ; but she led me to talk of the time when Reuben was little, and 'fore I knew it I was tellin' that girl how I used to leave my work jist ter look at him in the old wooden cradle. I told her what I'd most forgot myself :

how I could never let him lay there, but jest had ter take him up and hug him jest a minute an' then go on with my work. I've never meant ter be hard with the boy, but p'r'aps I forgit sometimes that he's pretty young still.

“Well, Miss Dayton looked up from the bows she was makin' pretty, and says she, ‘Reuben's a nice little fellow, and I think, if you were to try it, you'd find he liked petting still. I've talked with him many times since I've been here, and I find that his one idea seems to be to grow up as fast as possible so as to be able to help father and mother.’

“I tell ye, Mis' Weston, I was all took back to find a sweet young girl who was 'most a stranger to us had learned my boy's good traits 'fore I had. Well, when Reuben came in jist 'fore supper-time with his jacket with a big tear in it, I was jist ready ter say somethin'. He took the jacket off and hung it on my chair ter be mended; and layin' his hand on my shoul-



der, he said, 'I wish I didn't get my things tore quite so often, mother, but this time I couldn't help it.'

"It took lots er resolution, but I jest kissed him on his forehead, and the s'prised look on his face made me realize how long it had been sence I'd kissed him before.

"'Reuben,' says I, 'no matter what I say when I speak hasty, just remember that yer mother thinks the world of ye!'

"'F you'll believe me, that boy flew at me, and puttin' his arms round my neck he said, 'Why, mother, a minute ago I was awful sorry, and now I'm almost glad I tore my jacket.'

"'So be I,' says I, and then we both laughed, but we were jest as near cryin', and I tell you, Mis' Weston, I ain't never goin' ter have such a distance, so to speak, between my boy and me as there has been; I guess we understand each other now."

"Well, I don't know when I've heard any better news," said Mrs. Weston, taking off her glasses and slowly wiping them.

"I think pretty well of little Reuben, and I b'lieve, properly encouraged, he'll make a good man."

"Well, now, it beats all how Miss Dayton does things," said Mrs. Jenks. "Some folks would have blundered about it in a way that would have made me mad, but to this day, I do say, I don't know how she done it. And look at that bunnit," continued enthusiastic Mrs. Jenks, "didn't she make them bows pretty? I declare, there ain't a prettier bunnit in the meetin'-house than that."

"'Tis pretty," assented Mrs. Weston; "just as pretty as it can be."

"So I say," said Mrs. Jenks, "and now this mornin' I met Mis' Hodgkins and her husband. 'They'd just come from here,' they said, 'and,' says Mis' Hodgkins, 'we're goin' ter have the first apple-bee ter Mis' Weston's and,' says she, sorter smilin', 'I ain't sure's you'll be very anxious ter help, but we're all goin' ter do our part ter help make a grand time fer Miss Dayton;' and



says I, 'If it's fer Miss Dayton, I'll agree to contribute anything you like toward the supper, and I'll go right over now an' tell Mis' Weston so.' My, but didn't she look at me! I laughed ter myself, an' I said right out loud, as I drove off, 'Matilda Jenks, this is the last time any one will have a chance ter call ye stingy.'

"I commenced this mornin' by givin' Reuben a lot of maple sugar to treat the boys with, and I tell you Miss Dayton's 'bout right, it does feel good to give. We've been prospered, and from this time forth I ain't goin' ter be foolish with this world's goods; but I *vow* I won't be mean; so I've come ter say that if there's anythin' I can offer ter help make the bee a success, jest say the word an' you shall have it."

"Mrs. Jenks," said Mrs. Weston, kindly, "I always said ye hadn't but one fault, and now you've overcome that, seems to me you're pretty near perfect."

"I guess there's room fer improvement," said Mrs. Jenks, grasping her friend's ex-

tended hand, "but I've started in the right direction. Now, I must be goin', and remember I'll do anything ter help along that bee."

Mrs. Weston promised to remember, and as rapidly as she came Matilda Jenks strode down the path and drove away.

A few minutes later Randy came running in at the door. "Oh, mother," said she, "I ran out to look for Prue again, while Mrs. Jenks was talking, and, mother, she's doing the cunningest thing. She's playing read. She's lying on the grass back of the house, with the fairy book in front of her. She's making b'lieve read to Tabby. Do come and see her."

Softly they made their way around the house and, sure enough, there lay Prue, the wonderful fairy book before her, her elbows on the book, and her chin in her hands. Soon they were near enough to hear what she was reading, and yet not to be observed.

"Now, Tabby," she was saying, "you





*Amy Brooks.*





*mustn't* go to sleep when I'm reading to you. Now you listen: The princess — that's Miss Dayton, Tabby — is very beautiful, and so I know there must be a prince, somewhere, that she knows; 'cause, Tabby, in the fairy tales the princesses always has princes; and, Tabby, I'll tell you truly, Miss Dayton is prettier than any picture in this book. And, Tabby, she loves little girls and big girls, like my Randy, and she loves big womens and old womens and old mens, like Sandy McLeod; and, Tabby, I b'lieve, I most b'lieve she loves you, and I'm going to ask her.

“She prob'ly does love you; she seems to love everybody. This isn't all in the book, Tabby, but what I tell you that isn't in the book is true. I'm most glad the fairy stories ain't true; for if things did happen like what's in the book, maybe you'd turn into a frog, and then, Tabby, I couldn't hug you.”

Here Tabby rubbed her head against Prue's little arm. “There,” said the child,

"you *knew* what I said, didn't you?" and she sprang up, catching Tabby in her arms to "love her," as she called it.

"Oh, did you hear me reading to my kitty?" shouted Prue, as she caught sight of her smiling audience.

"We heard ye, and I guess some of it was full as pretty as what was in the book," said Mrs. Weston, and together the three wended their way back to the house, followed by Tabby.



## CHAPTER X

### THE APPLE-BEE

THE apple-bee was to occur on Thursday evening, and Mrs. Weston and Randy, with little Prue for "errand boy," had been busily employed in preparation for the delightful event. Prue made a fine little page, so delighted was she to be useful.

"Bring me the yellow mixin' bowl, Prue," called Mrs. Weston. Into the closet darted Prue, and over to the table with the big bowl she hastened. "Now what shall I do to help the apple-bee?" said she.

"Perhaps the apple-bee would like to have you pull all the stems off these raisins," said her mother, laughing. So Prue sat down upon the large braided rug near the door and began to stem the raisins with all her might. Soon Mrs. Hodgkins

arrived and imperiously ordered her husband to "lug in that crock from the wagon."

"For mercy's sake!" ejaculated Mrs. Weston, "whatever have you got there?" as, puffing and blowing, Joel Hodgkins landed an immense stone crock upon the kitchen table.

"Well, I'll tell ye," said Mrs. Hodgkins; "I know this is no donation party, but I had this big crock er doughnuts, and I says, says I, 'Somebody will eat 'em ef I take 'em over,' so here they be."

"Sophrony wouldn't think she was takin' part in the bee if some of her prize doughnuts wasn't in the treat."

Every one laughed at Joel Hodgkins's speech, and the doughnuts were very kindly received.

"We all know that your doughnuts are the best in town," said Mrs. Weston, "and I guess everybody'll be glad to have one, I'm sure —" but the remark was left incomplete as she hastened to the door to admit Mrs. Jenks.



"How are ye, Mrs. Weston? I had Reuben drive me over, and I've brought a lot of those big red apples, ef ye don't mind havin' 'em. Reuben an' I have rubbed and polished 'em 'til they shine like everything. I thought maybe they'd make the table look pretty," and she flushed as she offered this first contribution of her life.

"They will look handsome," said Mrs. Weston. "I declare it was real thoughtful in you to bring them. Why, for goodness' sake! How many did ye bring?" as Reuben arrived with basket after basket, which he placed in a row upon the table, and then commenced to make another row upon the swing table on the opposite side of the room.

"I've no idee how many there is," said Mrs. Jenks. "Reuben an' I commenced rubbin' and polishin' 'em right after breakfast, and we never stopped rubbin' 'til we was ready to start. Then we packed in the baskets, and here we be."

Meanwhile the neighbors had removed

bonnets and shawls, and three energetic housekeepers, with the help of Randy and little Prue, succeeded in "keeping things moving," as Mrs. Jenks had expressed it.

Suddenly, Jotham Potts's dark face peeped in at the door, with, "Say, Mrs. Weston, I'm a master hand at chopping, so any time I can help, just give me a chopping knife and tray, and I'll work like a major."

"I'll bear ye in mind, and call ye when I want ye," answered Mrs. Weston, and Prue rushed to the door to offer him a handful of raisins, saying, "I give them to you, Jotham, 'cause you're the biggest and the nicest boy I know."

"Thank you, pussy. Hey! where are you now?" and he swung the child lightly up on his shoulder.

"May I go with Jotham 'stead of picking any more raisins?"

"Yes, run along," said her mother, glad to have her in the care of some one whom she could trust to keep her out of mischief.



So busily did every one work that by Wednesday night the cooking for the spread was completed. Old and young had helped with a will to make the evening a success, and at last Thursday arrived, although Prue confided to Randy that she "b'lieved it never would."

When the final decorations for the apple-bee were in place, everything needed for the sumptuous spread ready, there was absolutely nothing to do but wait patiently for the evening to come.

The apples were to be cut, cored, and strung in the kitchen, the spread was to be in the "settin' room," and all the rooms were decorated so gayly that they appeared festive indeed. Randy had decorated the "best room," making it gay with branches of autumn leaves, in gorgeous colors, and sprays of scarlet privet berries.

The Babson girls had had a bright idea in regard to trimming the "settin' room."

"What's the reason we can't tie the corn husks together at the tip ends, and keep on

tying 'til we get enough to go around the room, and then hang up the long string of ears and husks just above the pictures?" queried Belinda Babson.

"Oh, Belinda!" screamed Randy, "that's such a bright idea, what ever made you think of it?"

"I just did think of it, that's all," said Belinda, much pleased that her design for decoration met with approval. So the girls rushed out to the barn to find Mr. Weston and ask permission to use the corn.

"Land, yes," he said when approached, "use anything within reach, I say, so long as it helps to make the house look pooty;" so, laughing gayly, the girls filled their aprons with corn, and running to the house commenced, in furious haste, to tie the husks together.

All the young friends had called that morning in a body to offer their help to Randy, and she had most gladly accepted it.

While the girls were tying the corn



husks, Jotham Potts and Reuben Jenks were making themselves very useful, for by this time the girls had discovered that it required a great many ears of corn with which to garland or festoon the room. The boys brought the corn in wheelbarrow loads and then offered to help do the tying.

"Oh, boys couldn't do this," said Phoebe Small, who was much piqued to see that whenever Jotham sat down to rest, he sat near Randy.

"That's one of your pleasant speeches, Phoebe," said Reuben Jenks, before his friend Jotham could reply; whereat Phoebe tied a hard knot in a corn husk with such unnecessary vim that it broke.

Reuben laughed slyly; and Randy with her usual kindness, appearing not to notice the tilt, praised Phoebe's pretty arrangement of red and yellow ears, and thus smoothed "ruffled feathers."

Jotham looked at Randy with real admiration. "I b'lieve she always does the right thing," thought the boy; so Phoebe's spite

only strengthened the admiration of Randy's young cavalier.

"I think I've got a first-rate notion for decorating," said Jotham, "and if you'll let me and Reuben do it I tell you we can make that front walk as light as day, and as handsome as a picture for to-night, Randy," and Jotham looked at the girl with eyes that sparkled with enthusiasm.

"Of course I'll let you do it, if it's fine," said Randy.

"Now you needn't ask questions, for it's a secret; and Reuben an' me'll do it, without telling anybody but your pa," said Jotham, and out rushed the boys to hold a whispered conclave on the back stairs.

"My, won't that be prime!" ejaculated Reuben, amazed at the brilliancy of Jotham's plan, and proud to be taken into a secret by a boy three years older than himself.

Mr. Weston laughed long and loudly



when the boys unfolded their plan, and declared that he'd do his part of it now. Accordingly, he soon appeared in the path which led from the road to the door, and began to drive long stakes into the ground on either side of the walk.

"What are you doing, father?" called Randy.

"Drivin' stakes, ain't I?" he responded, and with that she was obliged to be contented. The boys were out of sight, and the girls wondered what they were doing; but when at night a line of brilliant lights glowed on each side of the walk, they willingly declared the decoration a success.

Mr. Weston had driven the stakes quite near together and every one was capped with a jack-o'-lantern made from a great golden pumpkin, so that, from road to doorway, a line of grinning goblins served to give a flaming welcome.

At last everything was in readiness and the guests began to arrive. Reuben's mother had listened with much interest to

the boy's scheme, and had insisted on donating all the pumpkins required.

And now the wagons began to arrive, and great praise was bestowed upon the boys for their novel lighting of the walk. The pumpkins made very fine lamps, and one giant of its kind, fastened high above the door, smiled broadly upon each new arrival.

Team after team drove up to the door, and shouts and laughter rang out on the crisp evening air as the guests first saw the gleaming lantern rows.

At last nearly every one had arrived, and the rooms were bright with happy faces. In one corner a group of old ladies were chatting about the bees and huskings which they had enjoyed in their youth.

The farmers and their wives were buzzing away over the latest bit of village gossip, the women telling it as they "b'lieved it was," and the men using convincing arguments to show that they had heard it "straight" at the store at the four corners.



Girls and boys tried to out-talk each other, and everywhere the children ran in and out, playing "hide-and-seek" behind the sturdy forms of their elders.

Helen had coaxed Randy to refrain from brushing back every curling lock, telling her that her hair was made to curl; and thus convinced, Randy appeared at the bee with a soft fluff of her light brown hair making a halo about her face.

"I must say Miss Dayton's right; I like the looks of it," said Mrs. Weston, when Randy appeared before her with her hair dressed in the manner which Miss Dayton had suggested; so with much impatience Randy waited to see the look of approval on Helen's face when she should arrive. And others were looking for Helen in whose honor this festival was planned.

At last a resounding "Whoa! Be still, can't ye?" announced the arrival of old Sandy McLeod, and great was the surprise when, as Randy opened the door, Helen — smiling, radiant Helen — came in, saying,

"Good evening, friends," and followed by her ancient cavalier, old Sandy.

"The lass is late because too many lads wanted to bring her," said Sandy, his old eyes twinkling.

"That is true," said Helen, laughing, "too many lads, so I gave my choice to the eldest. Now for my bundle," and stepping out into the centre of the room Sandy showed, for the first time, that he held a large parcel.

"I have a little surprise for you, dear friends," said Helen; "I wished to offer my mite toward the evening's pleasure, so I will ask Mrs. Weston to allow Mr. McLeod —"

"Call me Sandy, lass," said the old man, gently.

"To allow Sandy," corrected the girl, "to place this box on the centre of the supper table, to be opened when we are all seated around the spread."

So the big box held its place of honor, and great was the curiosity concerning it.

The children now commenced to play



“the needle’s eye,” an old game popular among the country children, which is very similar to “London Bridge.”

“The needle’s eye it doth comply  
With the thread which runs so true.  
It has caught many a very fine lass,  
And now it has caught you.”

Little Hitty Buffum found herself a prisoner. However, she was soon kissed and released, and through the arch formed by clasped hands and uplifted arms trooped the children, keeping time to the sing-song chant of the queer verse. They saw nothing funny in the verse, however, and played the game with great enthusiasm.

Meanwhile the apples were being pared by industrious hands and soon the “stringing” began. Merrily the work went on with jokes and lively chatter, and before it seemed possible the task was completed.

The boys now gathered up the parings, carried them away, and once more the room was in order.

“Now, friends,” said Randy’s father, “let’s all have supper.” No one waited for a second invitation, and a cheery, happy party made a complete circle around the long table. What a spread that was! Hot baked beans and brown bread, mince pies, pumpkin pies, gingerbread and doughnuts, nuts and apples, made a “treat for a king,” said old Sandy McLeod.

“Now, Mr. Weston,” said Helen, “please open my box;” and when the cover was removed a chorus of “Ohs” and “Ahs” greeted the sight disclosed. Helen had sent to Boston for an immense box of bonbons, and to those simple country people, who knew naught but home-made confections, the rose and violet tinted dainties looked like a fairy gift. But if they were unacquainted with such candies, it took a fabulously short time to learn to like them, and soon the bottom of the box appeared.

Happy Helen, to have given so much pleasure! And now the table which had been so bountifully spread was beginning



to look bare, for everybody had had a most excellent appetite, and had done full justice to the meal. The chairs were pushed back and old Sandy asked to have a bit of music. "The little lassies who sang the other night, canna they sing?" said he, looking kindly at Prue and Katie, who were playing "bean porridge hot" together.

"Ain't any pi-ano here," said Katie.

"Never mind that," said Helen; "I think if you and Prue sing the little songs which you sang the other evening so sweetly, Sandy will, in return, make some music for you."

"That I will," responded the old man, heartily; "but there's naught so blithe as the sound of a bairnie's voice."

So wee Katie was mounted upon a chair, in lieu of a platform, and she sang the little solo, "Once there was a little mouse," giving all the verses, and even remembering to make a little bow as Helen had taught her. Indeed, she bowed so vigorously that she barely escaped losing her balance. Then she hopped down, and little Prue

sprang up in her place, singing, "Sometimes I am a daisy bloom," just as she had sung it at Mrs. Gray's on the evening of the tableaux. When she had finished the last lines,

"And next to those I love the best  
I love each one of you,"

she kissed her little finger tips to her admiring audience, as Helen had taught her to do.

Every one applauded, and old Sandy called the children to him, saying, "I'll make the music for ye now, I wad na hae the heart to refuse," and rising hastily he left the room. Every one was surprised at this abrupt movement and wondered if the childish voice had moved him too deeply, awakening the memories of his Scottish home and friends.

Silent he had ever been in regard to home and kindred, answering questions in a manner which invited no further queries; but since Helen's stay in the village he had



warmed wonderfully toward his neighbors, and seemed quite unlike the silent old man whom they had known.

But while they were wondering about his absence, Sandy reappeared. What a change! Arrayed in all the bravery of a Scottish chieftain, old Sandy stood before them, a picture indeed.

Over a kilt of tartan he wore the red coat and plaid, and on his head, crowning his white locks, sat a genuine Scotch "bonnet," with an eagle feather black as night. In his hands he carried the bagpipes, and while the children stared, open-mouthed, Sandy commenced to play. "Scots Wha Hae" rang out with a wonderful skirl, followed by "Bonnie Prince Charlie," "Jock o' Hazeldean," and a half dozen more, until old Nathan Lawton declared that there was no keeping still with such music, and when at his request the pipes commenced to play a rollicking reel, old Nathan remarked that he used to cut "pigeon wings" and he guessed he could now, took his position in

the centre of the floor, and proceeded to cut them in a wonderful manner.

If the children were delighted, so were their elders, for was this not a treat of which they had not dreamed? and, best of all, two old people who had been so cold and forbidding now were warmed and charmed into a friendly feeling with all their neighbors.

When Sandy and Nathan Lawton stopped to rest and regain their breath, the young people crowded around them to thank them and to examine the fine Scotch costume which Sandy wore.

"That's a pretty dress and jacket," said little Prue, admiringly, "and you've got such a long sash, too."

The child's admiration for his costume pleased the old man, and it was of small consequence to him that she called his kilt a dress. Lifting Prue upon his knee, he stroked her short fair curls, telling her how like the little lass she was who used to be his playmate in bonnie Scotland.









"Is she big as me?" asked the little girl, all unmindful that Sandy's child mate had had many years in which to grow.

A moment the old man hesitated, then, very gently, he told the child upon his knee of that other child away in bonnie Scotland; told her that when his little mate was a child, he had been a child too; that he had known her all his young life; that she had grown old as he had, and now — but here he paused, and practical little Prue, looking up at him, asked, "Is it far to Scotland?" Sandy told her that it was very far indeed.

"Too far to send letters?" was the next question.

"No," he assured her; "it was not as far as that."

"Then why don't you send the little girl a letter?" questioned Prue.

Those who had heard the question were fearful that the old Scotchman would be displeased.

For a moment a look of amazement rested

on Sandy's face as he stared at the innocent questioner ; then, as with an effort, he said, "I will, little lass, I will."

"I would," said little Prue, "and tell her there's another little girl, what you know, sends her love to her, will you, Sandy?"

"Bless the bairn ! Ye hae mair wisdom than ye ken ;" adding under his breath, "a deal mair wisdom than Sandy McLeod."

It was Helen, who, while walking by his house, had heard Sandy playing the pipes ever so softly, and looking in, had seen him playing, and, at the same time, looking lovingly at the old Scotch costume as it lay spread out upon the wooden chest in which it was usually kept. She had coaxed a part of his story from him that day, and he had declared he felt better for the telling.

The costume was one which his father had worn as chief of his clan when Sandy was a young man. There had been a dispute in which he and his father had been equally obstinate.



When the old man died, Sandy had left Scotland, taking with him the suit of tartan, the bagpipes, and, dearer than all, a letter in which his father forgave him for his part in the dispute. Further than this he refused to talk, saying nothing whatever as to living kinsmen or friends.

Having told a part of his story to Helen, to which she listened with ready interest and sympathy, it needed but a bit of judicious coaxing to get him to promise to play at the apple-bee.

And now the gayety, which had lulled while every one had listened to the music, revived, and each one present seemed to be trying his best to out-talk his neighbor.

"Isn't Miss Dayton's blue dress the very handsomest dress you ever saw?" said Jemima Babson.

"Yes, and isn't she the handsomest person you ever saw in *any* dress?" said Phoebe Small, looking sharply at Randy, who was looking unusually pretty with her hair dressed to show its curls and ripples.

“Miss Dayton’s splendid, we all know that,” said Jotham, blushing furiously; “but it don’t make it out that Randy Weston isn’t amazing pretty.”

And here another voice chimed in, “Did yer ever taste anything like that candy in yer life?”

“It was just splendid, and I do b’lieve —”

“Have ye noticed Mrs. Jenks? I do declare, she’s as much different from what she used ter be as possible. Why, she sent them fine apples, and gave the hull of them pumpkins, and —”

Just at this point Mrs. Buffum ejaculated, “Well, as I live! ef it ain’t half-past ten o’clock,” and she commenced at once to collect her brood. All were loath to leave the joyous scene, but the lateness of the hour made it imperative. Some one proposed a song before saying good night, and soon old and young voices chimed sweetly together as they sang: —

“All the year round, all the year round,  
What are the seasons to you or to me?”



Summer may go, bleak winds may blow,  
Roses crown winter if cheery we be.  
Sounds of the glad spring, pleasures the birds bring,  
These live in loving hearts where'er they're found;  
Sweet is the May time, sweet is the hay time,  
So sweet are loving lips, all the year round."

"Hooray for the apple-bee! Hooray for Miss Dayton!" shouted Reuben Jenks, "Hooray for the bagpipes and the dance!" Every one cheered, and Jotham, laughing at his friend's enthusiasm, shouted, "Hooray for every one and everything!" and they even cheered that; so, laughing and cheering, with lively chatter and snatches of song, wraps were donned and good nights said.

After the last guest had departed, Randy turned from the doorway, and going back into the house she sat down opposite her father, a happy smile upon her lips.

"Well, Randy," said her father, kindly, as he saw she had something to say.

"Oh, father," she said, "doesn't it make you happy to see every one having a good time?"

"Yes, indeed, it does," said father and mother together.

"I mean to try always to make people happy," said Randy.

"So do I," said little Prue; "but now let's go to bed."

Randy laughed, and saying, "You've done bravely, Prue, to keep your eyes open to-night," led her little sister up the stairs to their tiny chamber, where soon they were fast asleep.

The Babson girls talked until after midnight over the evening's entertainment, declaring it to be the "very greatest bee they ever went to."

Phoebe Small, having no sister to talk it over with, kept the candle burning until late that night, while she wrote in her diary a lengthy description of the event. Phoebe had heard her mother tell of keeping a diary when she was young, so, of course, Phoebe, who ardently admired her mother, immediately commenced to keep one.

Old Sandy McLeod, as he gallantly helped



Helen Dayton to alight at Mrs. Gray's door, thanked her over and over again for the pleasure she had given him in allowing him to be her escort, telling her that he was glad enough that she had urged him to play the pipes, since the music had given such pleasure; adding, "Old Nathan and old Sandy hae' na been the best of friends and neighbors, but to-night we hae shaken hands an' we're to be friends forever."

"Oh, I'm so glad," said Helen.

"And ane thing mair, lass," he interrupted, "about that letter the little lass was talking of, I'll write it to-night!"

"It is late, now," said Helen.

"None too late to write. I'll do it to-night and sen' it to-morrow, as sure as I'm Sandy McLeod."

True to his word, Sandy sat at his table until late into the night, writing a long, long letter. The candle flickered as his hand moved back and forth across the pages.

Many times he paused while writing, and with his head resting upon his hand, he

seemed to be thinking how best to express himself, so that his message might find favor with his old friend and playmate.

At last, apparently, the letter was completed satisfactorily; for as the old man arose from the table, a faint smile flitted across his face.

Crossing the room to the old chest by the window, he fumbled about until he brought from its depths a little package; then, walking to the table, he placed the tiny parcel between the folded pages of the letter, put the letter into its envelope, and with utmost care addressed it, reading the address over three times to make sure that it was correct. Under his pillow he placed the letter, saying, "With the light o' day I'll start ye on the journey." And of all the merry party who laughed and sang away the hours at the apple-bee, not one possessed a happier heart than Sandy.

And Helen murmured, softly, as she lay half awake and half asleep, "Every one was happy to-night."



## CHAPTER XI

### AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR

THE sun rose in golden splendor one morning to find that a curtain of purple haze prevented his sunship from showing all his dazzling glory.

It was indeed a typical October morning in New England. For a time the haze prevailed, holding her own bravely against the sun, who struggled for supremacy; but at last he rose triumphant, the mist softly melting away beneath his warm rays.

How fair and tall the slender birches looked as the bright rays gilded their white trunks! How cool and deep the little pool which reflected the birches and brakes which overhung its edge; and far away across the field a great black crow flew, cawing as he winged his way, then

perched upon a slender twig which swayed beneath his weight. Tiny sparrows twittered and chirped as they hopped about among the dried weeds, searching among the seed vessels for a possible breakfast.

Truly, all things were beautiful that morning; and Randy, from her chamber window, looked out upon the lovely scene, and on her face a smile and tear appeared,—a smile on the sweet lips in memory of the summer's pleasure; a tear at the thought of Helen's departure.

"It has been the nicest summer I have ever known," mused Randy, softly. "Everything has looked prettier since she taught me how to look at things. How sweetly she thanked me for the rose I cut for her without spilling one of the dewdrops. 'Twas only a little thing, yet she thanked me as if the dewdrops were diamonds. Why, she just made me wild to find something to give to every one, if giving made such pleasure. I remember that I said I often wished I had



more to give, and she showed me, oh, so plainly, that a smile or a pleasant word was worth the giving that I felt at once as if I were rich; for any one can say a pleasant word and all of us can smile. Oh, she's done us 'a world of good,' as the parson's wife said."

While Randy dreamed at her window, Helen stood in the doorway at Mrs. Gray's, and she, too, was thinking of the summer so happily spent.

Soon she would be at home, and in a few months the winter season would bring a round of social engagements.

Why had the days so quietly spent seemed so charming? What was the secret of their charm? Happy she had been, — very, very happy, — and so swiftly had the weeks sped that it seemed impossible that October had arrived. She had chosen to spend the summer, contrary to her usual custom, in a little country village, with no other thought than that in such a place she could be sure of rest and quiet.

She was a girl of generous impulses, and after becoming acquainted with the people of the neighborhood of the Gray homestead, many an opportunity for a gracious word or a generous action presented itself. How gently and with what ready tact she had made herself a friend to young and old, was proven by the genuine regret manifested whenever her departure was mentioned.

Helen had a host of friends of whom to take leave, and all were charmed and gladdened to hear that they would see her sweet face again sometime during the winter. She had called to see old Sandy once more before her departure, and he had had a wonderful bit of news to tell.

The letter which he had written after his return from the apple-bee he had posted early on the following morning. It was addressed to Miss Margaret McLean, and Sandy explained that, as her father had been a prominent manufacturer in the little Scottish town in which they had lived for years, holding large business interests and



owning a number of mills which bore his name, the daughter, his only child, must be well known there; so he had trusted that the letter, written after so many years' delay, might be promptly delivered.

Strangely enough, it had never occurred to Sandy to wonder if his old playmate were still living. To his great joy, an answer to the letter came sooner than he had expected. She was still waiting for him, she said, as she had ever waited, hoping that the time would come when he would forgive her for teasing him,—it had been but a girlish freak,—and tell her that he loved her as of old.

Her father had lost much of his money before he died, but she had a “bit of property,” she said, and she had sold her little cottage and would leave on the next steamer for America. She would bring with her a little Scotch lass, an orphan whom she had befriended and trained to be a little maid-servant; and, insisting that Sandy should meet her and go at once to some kirk to be

married, she closed her letter with love to Sandy and a blessing for Helen and the wee lass, Prue. To Helen's congratulations he would only say, "It's your doing, lass, yours and the bairnie's."

Sandy confided to Helen that he had been afraid that Margaret might doubt that he and the Sandy McLeod of her youth were one and the same; but, he added: "I had a proof, I had a proof, lass! I had a lock o' her bonnie hair tied wi' a knot o' blue ribbon. I knew she'd na forget gi'en' it to me, and I put it in the letter."

"That was clever," said Helen.

"An' she said she'd bring it back wi' her when she sailed for America," added the old Scotchman, joyously; and Helen left him happy in the thought that although her farewell saddened him, there soon would be a dearer friend to greet him.

Farmer Gray had driven to the village early that morning, and when he returned he greeted Helen cheerily, at the same time



handing her a letter, saying, "I hope it is full of good news, Miss Dayton."

It proved to be a letter from her aunt, urging Helen to start at once for home, as an uncle who had not seen her since she was a very little girl was making a short stay in Boston, and wished very much to see his niece before he returned to his home in a western city.

"I am proud of you, Helen, as you know," wrote the dear old lady, "and I so earnestly wish Robert to see you that I wish you would start as soon as you receive this letter."

Helen left for Boston early that morning, asking Mrs. Gray to tell Randy that she would write to her as soon as she reached home. Helen's departure was only a day earlier than she had intended, yet she regretted to leave in such haste. She had wished to bid Randy and dear little Prue an affectionate good-by and reiterate her promise of a flying visit sometime during the winter months.

As she sat looking out of the car window and watched the little town receding, she thought of Randy's sweet face, and like a vision it appeared before her with grieved eyes and quivering lips, just as she knew the girl would look when Mrs. Gray told her of her friend's departure. Then a bright thought occurred to her, and a happy smile played about her lips.

Opening her little bag she took from it a block of paper, such as she had used for memoranda, and with a pencil she commenced a note to Randy. She would obtain an envelope and stamp as soon as she reached Boston. Helen possessed a merry wit, and leaf after leaf of the little block she filled with a breezy account of her journey. She described at length the man with three immense leather bags, who tried in vain to walk down the aisle with all that baggage, and was at last compelled to make three separate trips; the old lady with a box containing a cat which mewed dismally all the way; the woman with four children, who



seemed to have an endless supply of lunches, yet cried for more; the boy peddling prize candy, and any number of small happenings.

The writing served to make the long ride less tedious, and she knew that the letter would make Randy smile through her tears.

When Randy and Prue appeared at breakfast time they were amazed to find Aunt Prudence at the table.

"Why, when did you come?" questioned Prue, abruptly, staring at her aunt as if that lady had been an apparition instead of a very tangible reality.

"I came last night, after you children was in bed," said Aunt Prudence, "and I guess your father was 'bout as s'prised as you be."

"Wal', I guess I was," said Mr. Weston. "Ye was the last person I expected to see when I stopped near the depot to talk with neighbor Gray, but I was jest as glad to see ye as ef ye'd sent word ye was comin'."

Mrs. Weston also hastened to assure her that her unexpected arrival was a pleasant

surprise, but the children could not say a word. Prue was filled with a dread of Aunt Prudence's sharp eyes, which would be sure to detect any sign of plotted mischief; and Randy, knowing Prue's intense dislike of supervision, realized that careful watching, amounting almost to strategy, would be necessary to keep the little girl from vexing Aunt Prudence, thereby actually showing her how intensely she disliked her.

Although the morning hours were fully occupied, Randy was aware of a subtle sense of change in Aunt Prudence. She looked as angular and austere as before, but her voice seemed less shrill, and her sharp eyes behind her glasses looked out with a softened light.

"Perhaps we didn't really know her before," said Randy to Prue.

"P'r'aps maybe we didn't," answered Prue. "She calls me Prudence same's she did before, but she says it diffe'nt."

"That's it," said Randy, "her voice is pleasanter."



“And her eyes isn’t always looking at me, so I don’t darest to move,” said Prue.

Randy turned away quickly, that Prue need not see her laughing. The idea that any one could prevent her little sister from indulging in almost perpetual motion, seemed utterly funny to her.

Half an hour later Randy chanced to hear Prue talking to Tabby, just under the kitchen window.

“Now, Tabby,” she was saying, “if you lie real still while I drag you ’round, you’ll get a lovely ride and nobody’ll ever know it; but if you squirm and act naughty, I’ll put the basket right back in Aunt Prudence’s room, and I won’t give you any ride at all.”

Randy waited to hear no more, for upon looking out over the wide window-sill she espied naughty little Prue dragging Miss Prudence’s best cap basket around the dooryard. She had made Tabby lie in the basket, then pressing down the cover

she had fastened the little straw loop and thus locked Tabby into a very close carriage. Out rushed Randy, to rescue Tabby and the pretty basket at the same time.

"What makes you think to do such naughty things, Prue Weston?" said indignant Randy; "don't you know you're plaguing Tabby and Aunt Prudence at the same time?"

"Tabby likes to ride," asserted Prue, "and I don't care if I do plague —" but the mischievous little elf did not finish the sentence, for on looking up, there stood Aunt Prudence in the doorway.

Randy's face was suffused with hot blushes, and Prue, naughty little Prue, looked completely abashed.

Aunt Prudence was the first to speak. "Bring my basket to me," said she, abruptly, but not unkindly.

Slowly Prue unfastened the cover of the pretty, round cap basket, and with even more moderation Tabby stepped out, stop-



ping to yawn and stretch while her hind legs were still in the basket.

Prue stooped and energetically lifted her out upon the ground. Randy watched Aunt Prudence while Prue walked very slowly toward her, the forefinger of her left hand in her mouth, while with the right hand she reluctantly handed the basket to its owner.

Did Aunt Prudence smile? Randy thought she espied a twinkle in the sharp eyes behind the glasses.

"Now," said Aunt Prudence, "s'pose you come into my room while I show you something worth looking at."

Into the house, slowly following Aunt Prudence, went Prue and Randy, filled with mingled curiosity and dread of the thing which they were soon to see.

Aunt Prudence bent over her little hair-covered trunk, lifting aside this parcel and that until, oh, could it be true, a cunning little wooden cradle, painted bright red, made Prue utter a shrill cry of delight.

"Oh! oh! is it for me?" cried Prue. "Oh, I am so sorry I was naughty!"

Aunt Prudence put the cradle into Prue's chubby hands, who at once held it up for Randy to admire.

"It's a beauty," said Randy. "Oh, Prue, you'd ought to be good now."

"I will," said Prue; then, turning to Aunt Prudence, she said, "I guess I almost love you now, and I won't ever plague you."

"Well, I guess my basket ain't hurt much this time; but don't borry it again, child. I guess the cradle will 'bout fit Tabby."

"Oh, I do b'lieve it will! I'll go and 'medjure' her in it," said Prue, and away she scampered in search of her kitty.

Left alone with her aunt, Randy hesitated a moment, then venturing a step nearer, she said, "I think you were very good to give the pretty cradle to Prue just when she'd been so naughty; but," added Randy, as usual anxious to shield her little sister, "she isn't always naughty, and



now I'm 'most sure she'll try to please you." She looked up wistfully, hoping for a kindly word for Prue whom she loved so dearly.

"Children will be children," said Aunt Prudence, with a grim smile. "I guess she's no wuss'n the average."

"Father says you never had days of being naughty when you were a little girl, so I should think Prue'd seem extra naughty to you," said Randy, slowly moving the toe of her shoe back and forth along the cracks in the floor. As she glanced shyly at her aunt, hoping for one more consoling word in regard to Prue, she was much surprised and relieved to see Aunt Prudence actually smiling.

"I guess your father's forgot about the time I threw his hat down the well to see if it would float."

"Did *you* do that?" asked Randy, in surprise.

"Yes," said Aunt Prudence, "and what's more, I did it on purpose to plague him. He was goin' fishin', and I wanted to go,

too. He said girls wus no good at fishin' and went to the shed to get his rod and line, whistlin' in a way that provoked me. His hat was on the grass near where I was standing, and, quick as a flash, I snatched it up and threw it down the well, thinkin' it would delay his fishin' trip for one while. It didn't, though. He went bare-headed; and soon's 'twas found out what I'd done, I got punished for spoilin' his hat. Yes, your father remembers my good days, an' it's just like him to forget that I ever had naughty ones. But, Randy," she said abruptly, "ye don't ask if I brought anything in my trunk for you."

"Why, I never thought of it," said Randy.

"Like enough," said Aunt Prudence; "it seems to me ye nearly always think of somebody besides yourself, Randy. I must say, I approve of ye. Yer father, every time he writes me, has something ter tell of you children; and now you jest help me unpack my trunk, an' I'll show ye some-



thing that, ef I ain't mistaken, will please ye mightily."

"Indeed, I'll help you. I'll like to," said Randy, and soon the contents of the trunk were spread upon the bed. Those garments which could be hung up were placed upon hooks in the closet, and other articles were neatly folded in the bureau drawers. One puffy-looking package remained; this Aunt Prudence placed in Randy's hands, saying, "There, Randy, there's the material for making some Christmas presents; and if it makes ye happy, I'll be glad of it."

Very eagerly Randy untied the parcel, and uttered a little cry of delight when the open wrapping disclosed some beautiful colored worsteds of various hues.

"I'll teach ye ter knit while I'm here," said Aunt Prudence. "And now the evenings are beginning to be cool, ye might begin ter make a pretty little shawl for yer mother out of that deep red worsted; I guess there's enough of it. That blue

yarn will make some mittens for little Prudence, and the rest of it ye can do what ye like with."

Randy's delight knew no bounds, and she could hardly wait to hunt for needles and have her first lesson in knitting.

That night, in their little chamber under the eaves, the children talked of Aunt Prudence.

"I always said Aunt Prudence might be nice, if we really knew her," said Randy.

"Yes," said Prue, "you said that when she was here before, I 'member it; but, Randy," she added, "that was when I was a little girl."

Randy stifled a laugh, "Why, Prue, what are you now?" said she.

"Now, Randy, you do know you med-jured me last Saturday, and you said I'd growed most a inch."

"Well, so you have," said Randy, gently, "and it's likely you'll grow a lot more this winter."

"Course I will," said Prue, "and, oh,



Randy, mustn't Aunt Prudence have growed awful fast when she was a little girl? Just think how big she is now! She's growed good awful fast, too, Randy," she continued, "for she wouldn't have gived me that little cradle for anything the last time she was here, would she, Randy?"

Randy ignored this question.

"We ought to be going to sleep, Prue," she said; "but I'll tell you something first: I mean to be just as nice to Aunt Prudence as I can, while she stays here."

"So do I," said little Prue. "I told her to-day when her needle plagued her, I told her I'd fred all her needles when she was sewing, and you'd never guess what she said, Randy. She said I was a good little girl, — she did, truly."

The patter of raindrops on the roof soon lulled the children to sleep, and in their dreams Aunt Prudence figured as the Goddess of Plenty, distributing gifts with lavish hands.

## CHAPTER XII

### A WEDDING FEAST

SUNDAY morning Randy and Prue were early at church, and as they leaned back against the pew, in expectation of one of Parson Spooner's long sermons, Randy put her hand in her pocket and lovingly caressed a square envelope which she had placed there before starting for church.

"Got any candy in your pocket, Randy?" eagerly questioned Prue, as she leaned toward her sister. Randy shook her head.

"Didn't Jotham give you some when he speaked to you at the door?" she asked in such a loud whisper that Randy ejaculated "sh-sh," and again shook her head.

"Then what's in your pocket?" persisted Prue.



Randy drew Helen's precious letter from her pocket, showing just enough of the envelope to satisfy Prue's curiosity. Then the little girl took a hymn book from the rack, and with her wee forefinger commenced to point out, and at the same time name those letters which she knew. She found every O upon the page, then every S, and Randy thought best to let her thus amuse herself as, at least, she was quiet — a most unusual thing.

Helen had mailed the letter at once upon reaching Boston, and Mr. Weston had brought it from the village on the following day and placed it in Randy's hand as she sat listening to Mrs. Gray, who had called to deliver Helen's message.

"A letter for me, father?" questioned Randy in surprise. "Why, who's it from?"

Mr. Weston laughed. "Shouldn't wonder if ye had to open it to find out, Randy," said he.

Randy opened it and laughed with delight

when she found it was from Helen. She had read it three times and had taken it to church with her, because she said she "just couldn't leave it at home."

So Sunday morning Randy kept her mind upon the sermon, and her hand upon the letter. The sermon had been less lengthy than usual, and when the good old pastor had closed the Bible, he removed his spectacles; and as he slowly wiped them, he said: "Dear friends, I have a notice to give to-day, or perhaps I should say an invitation, and there could be no better time or place for what I have to say.

"A quiet wedding ceremony took place at a little church in New York City, the contracting parties being our friend and neighbor, Mr. Sandy McLeod, — or, as the papers have it, Alexander McLeod, — and Miss Margaret McLean of Scotland, an old playmate and friend, from whom our friend has been separated many years. I have received a delightful letter from him in which I am asked to make this announcement, and to



say that they will be at home on Wednesday evening. They extend an invitation to all the good people of this town to be present, and an especially urgent request that all the children be there."

What a stir that announcement made! What a great event!

Sandy's farm was one of the finest in the neighborhood, and his house the largest and most substantial in the place; but Helen and Parson Spooner were the only people who had ever entered it, save Sandy himself and the men who worked for him.

Fabulous tales the men had told of the fine things which the house contained; so curiosity was rife regarding it, and now every one, even the little ones of the parish, were bidden welcome.

After church Randy stopped a moment to speak to the Babson girls and Phoebe Small, to tell them of the letter from Helen, promising to read it to them if they would call on Monday afternoon.

The girls promised, saying, "You can

read us the letter, and then we'll talk over the party, or whatever it is to be, at Sandy McLeod's."

Promptly, on Monday afternoon, the girls arrived, and the letter was produced and read. How they laughed at Helen's bright description of the events of her homeward journey. Phoebe Small felt that in receiving the letter Randy had been especially favored. A little twinge of jealousy caused her to part her lips to make a sharp little speech ; but, remembering a promise to Helen, and her own resolution, she said pleasantly, "You must have been pleased to receive it, Randy ; I'm glad she wrote it to you."

It was so unlike her usual remarks that the Babson girls looked at each other ; but Randy slipped her arm around Phoebe as they stood by the window, and Phoebe felt rewarded.

They talked earnestly over the event of Wednesday evening, and all were enthusiastically expectant.



As the afternoon waned, the girls took leave of Randy, looking back as they went down the road to call to her, "We'll see you Wednesday night."

Wednesday proved to be a lovely day, and the evening sky was bright with stars, the air cold and crisp when the merry party drove up to Sandy's door. As no one wished to be the first to arrive, a large party met at Mrs. Weston's house and together they drove to the McLeod farm.

The large house was ablaze with lights, and as the teams stopped, the door was opened wide and a cheery voice shouted, "It's glad we are to see ye, friends, come in, come in," and Sandy led the way proudly to a silver-haired little woman, who stood waiting to greet her husband's friends and neighbors.

Such a sweet-faced little woman, who had a gentle, gracious word for every new friend, and a kiss for each one of the children.

When Sandy brought Prue to her, saying, "This is the little lass, Margaret, wha said 'write the letter,'" she took the child upon her lap and put her arms about her, saying, "Bless the bairn, will ye come sometimes to see me? it wad gae me much pleasure."

"Oh, yes, I will come," answered Prue, "if I may bring Randy. She's my big sister, and there's no one like her anywhere."

Prue was assured that Randy would be more than welcome. Every one was charmed with the gentle little Scotch woman, who seemed equally pleased with her new friends.

They sometimes found it a bit difficult to understand her. Sandy had been so long in America, and had tried so earnestly to be like his neighbors, that he expressed himself in very good English, with here and there a bit of his old dialect appearing. His wife, however, had lived in a little town some miles distant from the city, and



used many words which, while in common use in the Scottish village, were utterly unknown to her new friends. But her manner could not be misunderstood. It was unmistakably the manner of a gentle, lovely character, bearing good-will to all.

The hum of conversation rose to a din as the young people laughed and chatted. All had been admiring the furnishings, which were indeed charming. There were some quaint old chairs which had belonged to Sandy's father; a large family portrait hung on the wall above the fireplace; some beautiful old candlesticks in which bright tapers burned; and the evident delight of their guests charmed Sandy and his dear old wife.

"Now, friends," said Sandy, stepping forward, "ye ha' all seen my Margaret, noo will ye walk this way and I'll gie ye another surprise," and he led the way to the end of the parlor, where he opened a door, and there at the head of a long table, spread

with a feast such as no one in the village had ever seen, stood Helen Dayton.

With a sharp cry of delight Randy ran to greet her, and was folded in Helen's arms. Then every one crowded about Miss Dayton, and many were the questions with which she was plied.

"I cannot answer all these questions," she said with a merry laugh; "but I'll tell you how I happened to be here again so soon. I hastened home, as many of you know, to see my Uncle Robert, who was to be in Boston but a few days, and on the day of his departure for the West I received the glad news of the wedding in a most delightful letter, which also contained a cordial invitation for me to be present and surprise you all to-night."

"We're glad enough to see you again," said Jotham Potts, and a chorus of voices echoed the boy's frank speech.

Then the feast began. Such a treat it was to Sandy's neighbors and friends. The children were fairly wild with excitement.



A giant wedding cake graced the centre of the table, and the beautiful frosting, with its garlands of flowers and little sugar cupids, delighted the children, who thought it the finest thing which they had ever seen.

A huge platter of roast turkey on one end of the table, and one of roast goose on the other, proved very tempting; and a chicken pie with its fluted crust was not to be ignored.

When these were removed, Sandy filled their places with huge fancy baskets of fruit; and still the candles burned and flickered, and the hum of merry voices filled the old house with gladness. At a late hour the happy party left, the neighbors, one and all, wishing the dear old couple every blessing, and promising to be as neighborly as their busy lives would permit.

To Randy, Helen said: "I shall not run away this time without saying good-by. I will come to-morrow and spend a little time with you, and then you may go with

me to the village, where I must take the train for home."

Bright and early on the following day, Randy was up, singing as she moved about the kitchen, as usual, trying to help.

"She's coming to-day, she's coming to-day," sang Prue, as she skipped about the room, and Randy's heart joined gladly in the song.

At that very moment Helen was coming up the walk, and as she tapped lightly at the door, Prue ran to let her in.

How bright she looked in her cloth gown and trim jacket, her feather collar and bewitching hat. She took off her wraps, as Mrs. Weston suggested, and sat down to chat with Randy.

"What is the news?" said Helen. "What has happened during my absence, Randy?"

"Very little has happened," said Randy, "only a few things. School is to open next week; that's a week earlier than last year, and Mr. Lawton says he'll keep



his best room warm enough for us if it takes his whole woodpile."

"And I'm going to school," said Prue, and she looked at Helen as if she expected to see that young lady stunned by such an announcement.

"I'm going to study reading and rilm-tic," she added, hoping to produce even more of an impression.

Helen and Randy laughed, "I hope they will reserve 'rilm-tic,'" said Helen, "until a little later."

"When there is snow," said Randy, "we can coast on our sled down to Mr. Lawton's house, without stopping; and although I'm pretty tall this winter, I think I shall coast just as I did last season, only this year Prue will sit behind me."

"And Jotham 'most always drags her home, so she don't have to walk 't all," said Prue, anxious to tell all the particulars.

"Randy is fortunate to have such an accommodating friend," said Helen, "and

now I have something to tell you. I have been helping my aunt to make some plans for the winter, and I have really found three days at the Christmas holidays for which I have made no engagements, and, if it will please you, Randy, I will give those days to you."

Mrs. Weston paused in her work to say, "We shall all be pleased to have you with us, and Randy will be wild until you come."

Helen had taken leave of Sandy and his wife at their home, so when Randy's father brought the old horse and wagon to the door, she said good-by to Mrs. Weston and little Prue, and with Randy and her father rode to the depot at the centre.

They arrived just a few moments before the train was due, and Helen and Randy walked up and down the platform, talking earnestly over the promised visit and the winter schooldays so soon to commence.

"I shall think of you every day," said Randy, "and I mean to study so hard this winter that some day, when I write, I shall



be able to tell you that I am at the head of my class."

"That is right," said Helen; "ambition and hard work will accomplish wonders."

Just then the whistle sounded, and soon the train came around the curve and stopped at the little station.

Very gently Helen kissed Randy, saying, "Remember I shall soon be here again."

Then the train started, and through her tears Randy saw Helen's beautiful, smiling face at the window. When the last car was out of sight, Randy turned toward her father a face which was a combination of smiles and tears.

"Well, Randy," said he, "which is it, laughing or crying?"

"Both," said Randy, "crying because I am sorry to have her go, and smiling because I know just when she will come again. And, now, father, I am going to tell you something. I mean to be the best scholar in school this year. I'd like to be able to talk and write as well as Miss Day-

ton does. I don't suppose I could do that, but I will come as near as I can," and Randy looked to her father for his approval.

"That's right, Randy, that's right," said her father, heartily, "and now, I'll tell *you* something. Sandy McLeod says that if Nathan Lawton gives the use of his best room for a schoolroom to the children, he isn't going to have Nathan outdo him, so he's offered a prize of a five-dollar gold piece to be given to the best scholar at the school this winter. I am glad that you spoke your mind before you knew about the prize. I'm willing you should try for it, but I'm glad to know that you intended to study before you had any idea of a prize to be won."

"I'll make myself a good scholar," said Randy, "and I'll get the prize, too." Randy never forgot that morning.

Years after, the scene, in all its completeness, would rise before her with a perfection of detail that would for a moment startle



her : the old mare leisurely crawling up the road toward home ; the stone walls along the sides of the road, still covered with blackberry vines, their foliage russet-colored against the cold gray stones, and their thorny stems red in the October sunshine.

Across the fields the roads were dry and dun-colored, but in places the grass was still green, and over all the bright blue sky with its floating clouds. Birds twittered in the tree-tops or flew in swirling lines above the sunny fields, and everywhere, although the trees were bare and the flowers gone, a feeling of gladness and cheer seemed present.

Randy turned to speak to her father and found that he was looking curiously at her. "Oh, father," said she, "I was just thinking that it seems as if everything was glad for some reason this morning. I don't know how to tell you just how I feel, but the sky seems so bright, the birds are singing, and when I looked at you I thought that you looked glad too."

"Well, Randy, I see just what you mean. It is bright and glad and sunny to-day, and as to my looking glad, I think I ought to. I've got your mother, and Prue, and you, Randy, and I've got something more to be thankful for — something to be thankful to *you* for."

"Thankful to *me*!" gasped Randy, in amazement.

"Yes, Randy, yes. I got a letter last night. Ye know I went down to the centre after supper, and I didn't get home 'til after you and Prue was in bed. Well, I wasn't expecting to hear from anybody, special, and I never opened the letter 'til I'd put the cat out and fastened up. Then I thought of the letter and sat down at the table to read it. Yer mother was puttin' the last stitches into a stockin' she was mendin' when I came to a place in the letter that made me hop. Mother came, and looking over my shoulder read the line I put my finger on.

"Randy, do ye remember that day last



summer when ye listened at the roadside to what Jason Meade was sayin' 'bout makin' me sell my pasture land to him? Do yer rec'lect how ye run 'til ye was 'bout beat out to reach me 'fore he could, and how ye begged me not to sell?"

"Why, yes," said Randy; then in sudden fear, "he didn't make you, did he, father?"

The girl's wide open eyes looked anxiously up into his face as she grasped his arm and waited for an answer.

"Make me! Well, I guess not! Randy, that letter was from the big railroad company, and, val'ble as I thought the land would be, they've offered me more'n I ever dreamed of. I shan't be what city folks would call wealthy, but I'll be 'stonishin' well off. Your mother and I will be able to take things a little easier; and, Randy, you shall have all the schoolin' ye want, and so shall little Prue. I'd 'bout made up my mind to let Meade have that land, he seemed to have set his mind on it; and I b'lieve I should have let him have it, ef you

had gone on ter Mis' Gray's and stopped to tea with Miss Dayton, as you intended. But for you my land would have been in Jason Meade's hands, and I might 'a' whistled fer it. You gave up your pleasure to do the right thing at the right time; as I said that day, I've got a daughter to be thankful for."

"Oh, father," said Randy, "it seemed a little thing to do, but I was so anxious to reach you in time that I forgot everything else, even Miss Dayton and the tea at Mrs. Gray's."

"Well, ye did yer duty, Randy, even when ye feared the men would find ye listening and be angry. Always be brave to do right, as ye did that time, and ye'll make a fine woman."

Small wonder that Randy remembered that morning's ride! The bright sunlight of her father's commendation seemed to outshine nature's sunshine. The thought that she had been instrumental in bringing good fortune to her parents, who had toiled



early and late, filled Randy's heart with a gladness which she would have found difficult to describe.

Mr. Weston accepted the company's offer for his land, and with their good fortune he and his wife seemed to have regained a bit of their youth; and they were never happier than when making plans for Randy and Prue or lending a helping hand to some friend or neighbor less fortunate than themselves.

Randy still indulges in day-dreams which, at present, are filled with anticipations of schooldays so near at hand, and the winter's pleasures which the boys and girls of the village are already planning; and when next we meet Randy and Prue, it will be in "Randy's Winter."





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